

DOUBLE-VOICE DAN'S DOUBLE DISGUISE!

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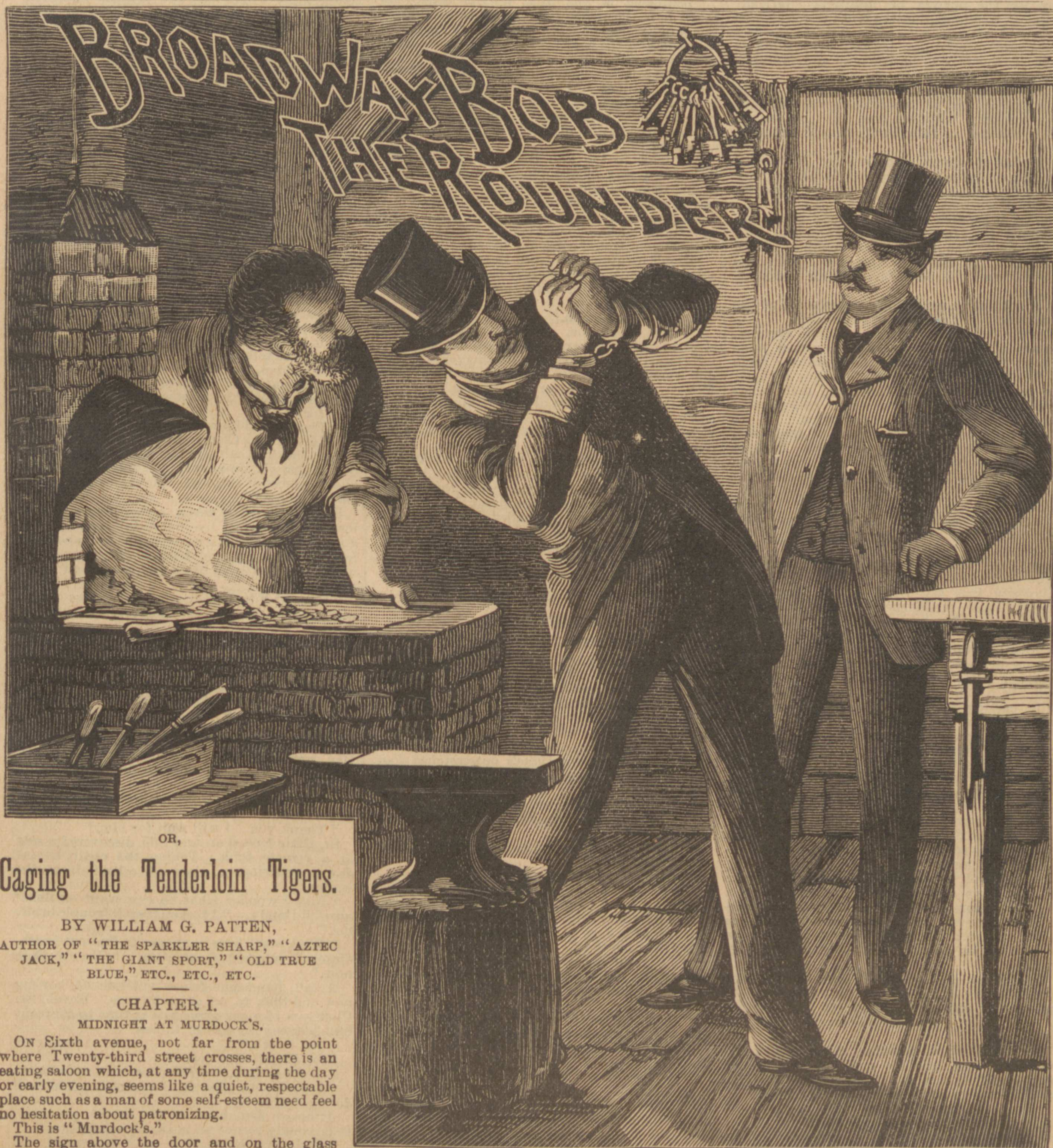
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OR,
Caging the Tenderloin Tigers.

BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN,
AUTHOR OF "THE SPARKLER SHARP," "AZTEC
JACK," "THE GIANT SPORT," "OLD TRUE
BLUE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

MIDNIGHT AT MURDOCK'S.

ON Sixth avenue, not far from the point where Twenty-third street crosses, there is an eating saloon which, at any time during the day or early evening, seems like a quiet, respectable place such as a man of some self-esteem need feel no hesitation about patronizing.

This is "Murdock's."

The sign above the door and on the glass lamps just outside reads: "Continental Ladies' and Gents' Dining Parlors," but for all of this

THE ROUNDER'S FACE TURNED PALER WHEN HE HAD READ THE WORDS ON THE
MANACLES: "THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH!"

supposed-to-be high-sounding name, none of the regular patrons of the place ever think of calling it anything but "Murdock's." It is doubtful if one out of ten of them would know the place meant if they were asked about the "Continental Dining Parlors."

There are two rooms, both fronting on the avenue, in one of which there is a long bar, with bare tables ranged down the opposite side from the bar. This room is supposed to be especially for the "gents" who frequent the place, but sometimes, when the other room is filled to overflowing, a few "ladies" may be seen sitting at the bare tables.

Throughout the day the place does a moderate business, enough, apparently, to make it fairly prosperous. At about eleven o'clock in the evening the rooms begin to fill up with the class of patrons to which it especially caters. At twelve the front curtains are drawn. They are of white stuff, and a person near the windows can easily see through them. At one o'clock Murdock's is in full blast.

If, by any mischance, a respectable couple should happen to wander into Murdock's after the midnight hour, it would not take them a great while to discover the sort of place they had stumbled into. If they were wise, it would not take them long to get out.

In the "ladies" room a row of tables, covered with white cloths, run down on either side. At midnight there are as many men in this room as there are females, and that means that every table is surrounded.

At a glance, it would seem they were all there for the purpose of obtaining "refreshments" of some sort, but the truth is not always discovered at a glance. The "refreshments" served are mostly liquids, and everything is drank at Murdock's. Bottle beer and Mumm's Extra Dry is served at the same table.

The language to be heard in the place at the midnight hour is not particularly refined, and, later, one may witness a free fight or see an unruly imbibor of intoxicants turned out upon street.

The class of women who frequent Murdock's at night are nameless, and nearly all manner of men may be seen there. It is true the greater number of the male patrons are of the "shady" sort, but newspaper men, clerks and others occasionally drop in of an evening and look over the "gang." The newspaper men are in search of a story, the clerks looking for "mild dissipation," and the occasional visitor seeks excitement.

It is not such a rare thing to see some of the "blue bloods" of Gotham in Murdock's.

Not far from midnight, on a certain evening, a group of three men sat at the corner table furthest from the door in the "ladies" room at Murdock's. Three opened bottles of lager were on the table before them, and their heads were close together above their half-emptied glasses, while they talked in low tones.

They were regular frequenters of the place, all of them being well-known there. Perhaps the most important one of the trio was known as "Game Gus," and he had a reputation as a nervy gambler.

Game Gus was not more than thirty years of age and seemed to be a man of some education. His dress, as was natural, was rather sporty, and he wore several huge "sparklers" which he claimed were diamonds of the first water.

Opposite Gus sat Dave Fuller, known as "Dandy Dave, the Masher." Fuller was dressed in clothes of English material and make, and wore a large white chrysanthemum in his buttonhole, while a shining silk tile was canted back on his head in a rakish manner. He was a dapper little fellow with a curling blonde mustache which he caressed a good deal, all the while casting "killing" glances at the best-looking girl in the vicinity.

The third man was a tough. His character was plainly evident at a glance. This was Tom Duke, the Slugger, a person who knew the record of every prize-fighter who ever lived and was personally acquainted with a great many of the "lights of the Squared Circle." It was Duke's greatest desire to imitate Sullivan, and, whenever he became intoxicated, he did so by beating some small boy or knocking over an inoffensive old man.

It must not be surmised from this that Duke did not have any courage. He was simply a brute by nature as soon as he had indulged freely in stimulants. His courage at any time was not of the sort that produces heroes, but when backed by his pals, he would "put up a stiff fight."

He was not a handsome fellow. A huge scar ran down across his left cheek, ending at the bulldog jaw and making him look rather repulsive; but it was said he was proud of this disfigurement.

The Slugger was smoking a very black and very vile cigar, and his stiff hat was cocked over his left eye in a decidedly tough fashion, which served to advertise his true character.

"There's a new deal on," cautiously declared Game Gus. "The police have found out they're not in the game with us. Byrnes never cries quits but he's ready to pull out."

"Then what do you mean by saying there is a new deal on?" asked Dandy Dave.

"I mean there's a new hand we must look sharp for."

"Who?"

"A private."

"But?" sneered Tom Duke. "W'at's dem fellers mount ter? Dey hain't no good on der eart, see? Dey're jest fit fer chasin' arter shop-lifters an' kids!"

"The usual run are so, I confess," agreed the sport. "But this fellow is not of the usual run at all. He was on the regular force at one time."

"W'at was he fired fer?"

"He wasn't."

"Den why is he on his own hooks?"

"Because he is a holy terror and there is more money in the business to go it alone."

"Well, who is this wonder?" again asked Dandy Dave.

"Yes, let us know his name," urged Duke.

"It is Dan Downing."

"Holy Sayers!" gasped the pugilist. "Not dat Double-voice Dan?"

"The very same."

"But I t'ought dat feller was out of it—t'ought he'd retired fer good?"

"So he had, but he can't give up the business. He has returned to his old work and says he'll die in harness."

Dandy Dave drew a long breath.

"This means trouble galore for us," he affirmed. "Especially if he takes it into his head to bother with us."

"And that is just what he has done. He heard how the police have failed in getting at the gang, and so he said his first work should be to rake us off the board. It looks to me as if the cards were running against us."

"Dat's rot!" contemptuously asserted Duke. "Ev'ryt'ing has bin droppin' right inter our han's, an' I don't see no sign of der streak turn-in'. Dis feller hain't goin' ter pinch us der fu'st flop, an' we kin git outer der ring w'en he makes a rush fer us."

"It may be too late then," suggested Gus. "He has a way of dropping on people without giving them warning. There must be a meeting called, so the matter can be discussed. I'm a dead game sport, but I'm not playing against a sure thing. I know what's good for my health. Confinement would cause me to pine."

"Don't mention it!" urged Dandy Dave, with a fan-like wave of one shapely hand. "It makes me weary to think of doing time and being shut out from society."

"Shut in you mean."

"It's all the same. Bless my eyes! there's a strange girl over there, and she's a beauty!"

"Hang der gals!" growled the slugger. "We's got somet'in' else ter boder with jest now. You're allus lookin' arter der females."

"You mean they are always looking after me; can't resist my charms, you know. Oh, I'm right in it with the ladies! They all love me dearly."

"Now look at this!" he added, straightening up. "What in the world has Flash Fan dropped on? She's coming right this way, and I swear that is a duck she has on the string!"

The woman whom he called Flash Fan was piloting a man toward a table near the corner. The man was dressed like a sailor and seemed to have been drinking freely, for his step was unsteady and his manner hilarious.

CHAPTER II.

DETECTIVE DAN'S DISGUISE.

"BELAY there, old gal!" called the sailor. "Heave to and give an account of yourself. What port you bound for?"

"Come along!" exclaimed Flash Fan, sharply. "Don't make a show of yourself, Jack! Here's a seat at an empty table."

"Then we'll drop anchor right here," said he, stumbling over Tom Duke's outstretched foot. "Stickin' barnacles! Pull in your timbers, mate!"

The slugger started up, growling:

"What der blue blizzard's yer sprawlin' over me feet fur?"

"Avast, there!" exclaimed the sailor. "Stow that lip, or I'll—"

Flash Fan caught his arm.

"Sit down, Jack!" she commanded. "If you get into a scrap here you'll be walked all over."

"What! me? Me be walked all over? Oh, no! Not for Jack. If these land-lubbers try to walk over me they'll find they have run upon a reef! I've fit my way in every country on the face of the globe, and now I'm goin' the second cruise! Walk over Jack! Wal, I should be surprised!"

"Dern me skin!" grated the Slugger. "I'll jest hev ter give dat bloke one in der neck!"

The woman stepped between them, appealing to Duke:

"Remember he's with me, old man!"

The pugilist hesitated.

"Not'in' else couldn't saved him," he finally said, sitting down reluctantly. "I knows you, Fan, an' I lets up till you git t'rough wid der sucker."

The woman succeeded in inducing the sailor to sit down, which he did with his back to that of the man with whom he had so nearly become engaged in a fight. He allowed Fan to order, and she took champagne. When he paid for it he displayed a comfortable roll of bills, which caused the eyes of the woman vampire to glitter greedily.

Tom Duke growled a little, and then the trio began to discuss once more the matter they were talking of when the interruption came.

"This Double-Voice Dan is a holy terror," declared Game Gus. "He's dead game, clean to the ground, and no mistake."

"That's all right," said Dandy Dave. "As long as he lets us alone we don't care how game he is."

"That's where the pinch comes. He doesn't propose to let us alone. We must keep our weather eyes open for him."

"I've heard he's slick at disguising himself."

"The slickest cove on top of earth."

"How can we make sure he's after the gang?"

"Dere's one way," put in Duke.

"Name it."

"Wal, it's jest ter put anodder detective ter watch him. See?"

"That's a good scheme; but I don't know where we'll be able to find a man to cope with Dan Downing."

"They're not thick," confessed Dandy Dave.

"I knows der very man," asserted Duke.

"Who?"

"Did yer ever hear of Bob Sleek, the Shadder Sharp?"

Dandy shook his head, but the sport replied:

"Yes, I have heard of him. He's a man who can be bought with a dollar."

"Dat's der kind we wants," asseverated the Slugger. "He's crooked as any of us."

"Is he a regular detective?" asked the Masher.

"Reg'lar much as any of dem privates. He's got an office."

"And he had rather take a shady job than a square one. The result is that he has found himself in more than one tight corner."

"But he hain't never done time," put in Duke.

"He's too sharp fer dat. He allus works it so he gets clean off, no matter w'at happens."

"Then he's our man. The Tigers—"

"Sh! Careful, man!"

Dandy's face flushed.

"Blowed if I hain't getting careless!" he admitted, glancing around.

"You know what the penalty is!"

"I don't think any one overheard me."

Some one did. The sailor with Flash Fan had overheard nearly all that passed between the trio, even though he was leaning against the wall in a state of apparent intoxication and the woman was talking to him at the same time.

Of a sudden, the Masher started and uttered a low exclamation of amazement.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "What is he in here for?"

"Who?" asked his companions, looking around.

"Harold St. Clair! He's Bob's rival, you know; they're both playing for the same girl—old Webster's daughter. St. Clair never frequents places of this sort. He's one of the good-ies you know."

Harold St. Clair was a rather handsome fellow, about five feet ten inches tall, and built on a perfect model. His manner was cool and fearless; his face open and frank. He was dressed neatly and tastily in black and carried an unornamented cane.

"Hanged if he isn't coming right this way!" muttered the Masher. "I believes he means to speak!"

Dandy was right. The young man came straight down to the table where the trio sat, nodding easily to them.

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said; "but I fancy some of you know Robert Booth. I think I have seen you in his company. Am I right?"

"I shouldn't wonder a bit," replied Dandy Dan, something like a sneer on his face.

"Do you know where I can find him?" asked Harold.

"Not just now. He is to meet us here before one o'clock."

"Thank you. I will wait for him."

St. Clair looked around and discovered a seat at a remote table. Taking the chair, he sat down, ordering a glass of seltzer from the waiter.

"Now I wonder what he can want of Bob?" queried Dandy. "I reckon there's trouble brewin'."

"Well, we'll have a chance to find out immediately," laughed Game Gus. "Here's Bob, now."

A tall, handsome fellow approached, bowing now and then to an acquaintance. Harold St. Clair saw him and arose just in time to confront him between the row of tables.

"Mr. Booth."

"St. Clair! The deuce!"

Broadway Bob, the Rounder, was astonished.

"I wish to see you on a matter of importance," declared Harold.

Although astounded at the other's presence, Bob quickly recovered his usual composure.

"Well, you can look at me!" he replied, not

attempting to disguise the sneer in his tone and manner.

"Will you come outside?"

"No."

"You dare not!" hotly flashed Harold.

"You lie!"

"And you are a contemptible coward!" retorted St. Clair, suddenly forgetting his resolution not to make a scene and become engaged in a brawl in that place.

With an exclamation of rage, Broadway Bob struck straight at the face of the other, but the blow did not land.

Like a flash, Harold dodged, rapping his enemy across the knuckles with his cane.

The Rounder gave a cry of mingled pain and fury, lunging again at his nimble foe.

Fortunately, Harold was a trained athlete and a boxer of no mean skill. He avoided the rush, striking out, now, with his clinched fist, taking Broadway Bob just under the left ear and knocking him down instantly.

"By the great John L.!" shouted Tom Duke. "I'm into this!"

The Slugger and his companions sprang up, all of them trying to get at Harold. Encompassed by so many foes, the young man did not have half a show.

"Avast there!" roared the sailor, suddenly rising to his feet and taking a hand in the fray. "If there's any fun of this kind going, I'm shipped for the cruise!"

At which he struck Duke a terrific blow, upsetting the Slugger in a twinkling.

Game Gus wheeled and struck at the sailor. The man dodged, but the sport's hand swept away Jack's beard, which proved to be false.

A smooth-shaved, resolute face was exposed.

"Holy smoke!" gasped the gambler, in greatest amazement. "It's Double-voice Dan, the detective!"

CHAPTER III.

AFTER THE PANIC.

DETECTIVE DAN it really was! And, as usual, he was defending the weaker side.

Whenever Dan Downing witnessed a fight, he felt an irresistible desire to give the "under dog" a helping hand. This impulse had led him into many desperate encounters.

For a moment after Game Gus's exclamation there was a lull in the uproar; then somebody yelled:

"Down him!"

Immediately the women frequenters of the place screamed in chorus, many of them hurrying toward the doors, while the most of the men crowded toward the point where the outbreak had occurred.

With a smile on his rugged face, the detective "walked into" Harold St. Clair's assailants, his hard fists doing effective work.

Harold was surprised by the sudden appearance of this unknown friend, but, finding he was a friend indeed, as well as a friend in need, he turned his attention to Broadway Bob and the others.

The Rounder, who had been so quickly knocked down, was just getting upon his feet, his face working with fury.

"Curse you!" he grated, his eyes on Harold.

"You shall pay dearly for that blow!"

"It was a dose of your own medicine," the young man retorted. "You attempted to get at me."

"I'll get at you now!" and the Rounder sprang at the man he hated.

Harold met the attack firmly, parrying Bob's blows cleverly and delivering others in return.

"Let me git at dat detective sneak!" cried Tom Duke, who was also up once more. "I'll teach him better den ter swipe a feller w'en he hain't lookin'!"

"Come right over and get at me," invited Dan, as, with his strong right hand, he cast Dandy Dave aside, the Masher's shining tile going to the floor to be rudely crushed beneath the shifting feet of the mob.

Suddenly a voice cried:

"The police! They're going to raid the place!"

It was a trick of the ventriloquist detective, for such Dan Downing was—a ventriloquist of remarkable skill and the deception was effective, for with cries of alarm, the mob rushed for the doors in that senseless manner so customary when a panic of any kind falls on a collection of human beings.

Their one desire seemed to be to get out-doors at any cost, and they fought their way to the open air, overturning tables and chairs and upsetting the weaker women in their foolish frenzy.

In vain Cal Murdock, the proprietor of the place, called to them. They were like a lot of frightened cattle, deaf and blind.

With horror and rage, Murdock witnessed the confusion of the panic, listening to the thump, thump of overturned tables, the breaking of glasses, and the crash of the big panes in the doors.

"Oh, the fools!" he cried. "Where is the man who yelled police? I'll kill him!"

He did not have the privilege of injuring that person, for no one seemed to know who it was.

As for Broadway Bob and his companions, they had vanished in a sudden and most remarkable manner.

Seeing this, Double-voice Dan caught Harold St. Clair by the arm, saying calmly:

"Come along, young man. We must not be found here when the rabble is gone, unless we are anxious to be turned over to the police as the ones who caused the disturbance."

Harold said nothing, but he allowed the cool detective to pilot him from the place, and they worked their way out with very little difficulty.

The interior of Murdock's looked like a wreck when the last panic-stricken visitor had fought his way to the open air. Scarcely a table was left upright, and the floor was covered with broken bottles and glasses.

Murdock looked blankly at the signs of disaster, fumed a little, and then set his waiters to clearing up as swiftly as possible.

Several policemen came around and made inquiries. As usual, not one of them happened to be anywhere near at the time of the trouble. The proprietor of the "Continental Ladies' and Gents' Dining Parlors" gave a very plausible explanation, refraining from making any charges, and no arrests followed.

Within thirty minutes after the panic everything within Murdock's looked regular and in order, the only signs of an unusual occurrence being the absence of the usual crowd of patrons and the board strips nailed over the broken glass in the doors.

As soon as they were outside, Double-voice Dan turned to Harold St. Clair.

"Well, young man," grimly observed the detective, "you did create a hubbub in that place, and no mistake!"

"Not I! It was the fellow who yelled police."

"You can't lay it onto me that way."

"I don't mean you; I mean the person who shouted that the police were about to raid the place."

"That was yours truly, Dan Downing."

"What?"

"It is true," assured the detective. "I am the ventriloquist-detective, so called, and worked the little trick for the hundredth time, so that we might get out with whole skins. Do you know you ran up against four of the most dangerous men in low-down Gotham when you tackled Broadway Bob and his pals? You should have had the good sense not to tackle them in Murdock's."

"I did not intend to do so. It was my purpose to call Bob outside, but he would not go and tried to strike me."

"And with the assistance of his pals, he would have done you up to the queen's taste, had I not chipped in."

"I thank you for your kindness, Mr. Downing. I have heard of you—as who has not, indeed?"

"I have been on the retired list for two years, but I could not stand the monotony of business life. I gave up the attempt to become a business man and have returned to the harness. Once more Double-voice Dan is on deck, and now he proposes to make it warm for the crooks of the Tenderloin District. My first work is to make a clearing up in this questionable quarter."

"That is all right, but I want to engage you."

Dan shook his head.

"I am afraid I have my hands full just now. A little later I may—"

"Now or not at all. You seem to know about Broadway Bob. I want you to shadow the fellow a bit for me."

They had been walking down-town, and now turned into Fourteenth street.

"Come to my office," said Dan. "If that is what you want, we will talk it over."

They walked briskly along until the detective's office was reached.

"I don't know why I am inclined to speak so freely with you, young man," confessed the Go-It-Alone Detective, when they were within his office. "I am usually of a mum disposition so far as strangers are concerned. But you scarcely seem like a stranger, as I once did some work for your father."

"I trust you will be able to do this work for me, Mr. Downing. I have reason to believe Bob is a scoundrel, who is sailing under false colors to my injury."

"Ah! In what way, pray?" queried the great shadower.

"Well," spoke Harold, "we are both in love with the same girl, and apparently, just at present, he has the best of it, for he has told lies about me that have placed me in a bad light. That is why I hunted him up to-night. I intended to call him out and force him to acknowledge he had lied."

"Who is the young lady in the case, may I ask?"

Harold looked Dan square in the face, and then answered:

"You are the first detective I ever saw who seemed like a gentleman, and so I am willing to tell you."

"My dear boy," smiled the inquisitor, "detectives may have the instinct of gentlemen,

but their business may make it necessary for them to appear like almost anything else. Sometimes we are not able to be gentlemen, even though we would like to. Do you see?"

"I suppose that is true. The young lady is the daughter of a Wall street broker, Mr. Calvin Webster."

Dan started.

"Do you know the man?" asked Harold.

"I have heard of him," was the non-committal reply. "So you want me to obtain some evidence against Broadway Bob—something that will show him up in his true light?"

"If he is what I suspect him to be, a rascal, I think Mr. Webster should know it. If he were an honorable man, I would willingly take my chances with him in winning Miss Irma Webster."

"All right," nodded the detective, "I can look after Robert without putting myself out to any great extent."

They soon decided as to terms, and then Harold departed, leaving the ferret alone in his office.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Dan, to himself; "I have struck business enough! I heard a little something in Murdock's to-night that makes me fancy I will try playing a double role. If it can be worked, I may sometime be known as the Duplex Detective. Ha! ha!"

CHAPTER IV.

ROBERT SLEEK, "PRIVATE DETECTIVE."

ON Grand street, not far from Broadway, above a certain doorway hangs a sign which reads:

"ROBERT SLEEK,

"Private Detective."

If the visitor enters the doorway he will find himself confronted by a flight of unsteady and dirty stairs. Ascending these, he finds himself at Mr. Sleek's door.

The room which serves Mr. Sleek as an office is small, dingy, dusty and cobwebby. There is but one window, and the glass of that is anything but clean. Near the window is an old flat-topped table, on which sits an "O. N. T." thread-box, such as is used by many retail merchants in country towns to hold their entire stock of thread. There are several drawers in the box, which serve Mr. Sleek for various purposes.

The combined table and thread-box is the desk used by the tenant of the little room. Newspapers, writing-paper, pens, ink, etc., are to be seen on the table.

In the middle of the room sits a box of dirty saw-dust, which, as the floor around it plainly indicates, serves as a cuspidore.

In one corner of the room is flung an old hat, and a pair of worn-out shoes sit staggeringly in another corner.

Mr. Sleek spends the greater portion of his time with his feet resting on the table that serves as his desk, while he smokes a very black and decidedly vile clay pipe, now and then expectorating over his shoulder at the cuspidore, which he usually misses by about a foot.

This man is sleek in name only, for his appearance is rather slouchy and disreputable. His linen is soiled and his old-fashioned standing collar limps sadly, having a general tired air. His vest is usually unbuttoned, some of the button-holes being burst out and some of the buttons having ceased to do duty on the garment. His coat fits him illy, his pantaloons being the only really respectable garment about his person.

Oddly enough, Mr. Sleek insists on being in style so far as his pantaloons are concerned, and he is careful to have a pronounced crease pressed in them and takes particular pains that they shall not bag at the knees. This gives him the appearance of wearing his best trowsers with his common coat and vest, making one suspect he has not the money to purchase an entire outfit at one time.

Although Mr. Sleek may be sitting with his feet on the table when he hears some one ascending the stairs, he is never detected in that attitude if the person happens to enter the office. Mr. Sleek's feet will be found beneath the table, at which their owner will be sitting, writing as if his life depended on it.

The day following the events just related a finely-dressed and handsome young man ran lightly up the dirty stairs and entered Robert Sleek's office, not pausing to rap or fumble at the door.

The "famous private detective" was doubled over his table in a most painful position. Scratch, scratch, splutter, splutter, went the pen that was chasing over a sheet of paper at marvelous speed. If Mr. Sleek heard the visitor enter, he did not look up at once, evidently being too busy.

"Mr. Sleek."

Scratch, splutter went the pen, the writing having the appearance of hen's tracks.

"Mr. Sleek," somewhat impatiently.

"In a moment, sir," snapped the detective.

"Awful rush. Important. Sit down."

The visitor, who happened to be none other

than Broadway Bob, the Rounder, looked at the one spare chair in the room. It was covered with dust, and Bob did not sit down.

In a few moments, Robert Sleek stopped writing, thrust his pen behind his ear and whirled with startling suddenness toward his visitor.

"Well, sir, what is it, sir?"

"A job for you when you get down off your high horse," was the reply.

"Sir!" cried Mr. Sleek.

"There, there! don't put on frills with me, Sleek! I know all about you."

"Well, I don't know about you, young man," said the detective, with intended scorn. "My time is precious—"

"Come off! If you want to earn some money, I will give you an opportunity. If you want to queer yourself, just keep on trying to do the lofty act with me. Why, you old rascal, you haven't had a job for a week."

Sleek arose, his manner betraying injured dignity.

"Your language is not pardonable," he said. "However, as I have to deal with all kinds of men, I will listen to what you have to say."

"Do you want to make fifty dollars a week?"

"Fifty—dollars—a—week! Fif—fifty—"

Then Mr. Sleek stood gasping for breath.

"Exactly," nodded the Rounder.

"Say, what are you trying to work on me?" asked the detective.

"This is business. I want to secure your services, and I am ready to pay you fifty dollars a week."

"Ah-hum!" said Sleek, regaining his composure with an effort, thrusting his right hand into his pocket and jingling the three last coppers he possessed in all the world. "Fifty dollars is somewhat below my regular rates. Seventy-five dollars a week is—"

Broadway Bob turned toward the door.

"Good-day, Mr. Sleek."

In another moment the detective had him by the arm.

"Hold on! hold on!" he cried. "Don't go! Let's talk this matter over. Possibly we can make an arrangement. Here, take my chair—sit down. Fifty dollars! Well, what do you want me to do?"

He had urged Bob into the office chair, and he now stood between the Rounder and the door, as if fearing the visitor would make a break to escape.

"It will be work; I'm not going to give you this money," declared Bob.

"Of course not."

"Do you know Dan Downing?"

"Know Double-voice Dan? Well, I should say I did!"

"What do you think of him?"

"Oh, he's a fakir—no good on earth! Don't trust him with a job. He'll throw you down. I've got a record—"

"There, there; that'll do! I know all about you. You have a record that will not bear investigation. It's a wonder you are not doing time now."

"Sir!"

"Fall off your high horse, Sleek! This is not the time for fooling. I have come to you because you have that shady record. Do you consider yourself as good as Dan Downing?"

"Well, I—"

"This is business. You may find yourself pitted against him."

"What—me—against him?"

"Perhaps you wouldn't take the job?"

But Sleek was ready to take anything there was money in.

"Tell me just what it is you want me to do."

"I want you to shadow Downing—play detective on him."

"Oh!"

"Will you do it?"

"What do you want this done for?"

"Answer the question—will you do it?"

"For money."

"Fifty per week?"

"Make it sixty."

"Sixty it is—not another cent."

"Trade!"

"All right. Now, you are to watch him as a cat watches a rat. You are not to let him get out of your sight at all. I want you to find out all about his business and his plans as far as possible. I want you to find out what kind of a case he is working on and what traps he is setting. If he intends to make an arrest, notify me without delay. In fact, you must keep me posted as to all he does, says and thinks. Are you good for it?"

"Am I? Is there a man in New York good for it! I'm that man! I have done this kind of work more than once."

"That is why I came to you. You will not be breaking the law in any way, and you can scoop sixty per week without a doubt. You begin now. Come to me at the end of a week for your pay."

"My dear sir," blandly bowed Sleek, "it is my rule to always receive a week's pay in advance."

Bob hesitated a moment, and then he drew forth a fat pocketbook and passed over sixty dollars to the detective.

Five minutes later, the Rounder was going toward Broadway.

He did not see a man who came out of a doorway on the opposite side of the street from Robert Sleek's office and crossed over, ascending the dirty stairs.

That man was Double-voice Dan.

CHAPTER V.

DOUBTFUL LOVE.

IRMA WEBSTER was certainly a beautiful girl, despite which fact, even though her father was wealthy, she was not a spoiled child, remarkable though the statement may seem. Irma had inherited her father's good sense to a great extent, for her mother was decidedly frivolous and vain, being one of the persistent followers of "society."

Had he chosen to do so, Calvin Webster could have pointed back to a long line of noble ancestors. But he didn't waste his time in pointing backward. All his attention was concentrated on the present and the future. Webster was a money-naker, being a broker in Wall street, where it takes brains to exist and where only the fittest survive.

Calvin Webster was very proud of his charming daughter. His wife had never seemed to take any interest in him or his business affairs. So long as he made enough money to keep their Madison avenue residence running properly and enable her to indulge in all the new dresses and jewels she desired, she was satisfied with the course things were taking.

On the other hand, Irma seemed to take a great interest in stocks and bonds, and her eyes would glisten while she listened to her father's stories of "corners" and "stampedes." Outside his own home, Webster was a rather cold and reticent man, but Irma only knew him as the "jolliest father that ever lived." Having no one else to share his secrets, he unbosomed himself to her.

It was, therefore, no more than natural that she could confide in him. He was surprised when she told him she believed herself in love, and his face plainly betrayed his astonishment.

"Why, you are nothing but my little girl—my Irma!" he exclaimed. "You are not old enough to have a lover!"

"You forget this is really my second season out, father," she replied. "True, I have not cared to go about so much as most girls, but mother has been trying to peddle me off to some count or duke ever since my appearance in social circles."

Calvin Webster brushed his hand across his forehead and drew a deep breath.

"It is really true I am growing old," he murmured. "And still it does not seem I have a daughter old enough to get married. All the years have passed so swiftly; they have been spent in struggling for money. And when it is obtained, how very little it amounts to!"

"You fancy yourself in love, dearest?"—He always called her "dearest."—"Who is the fortunate man?"

She drew back and blushed.

"Really, father, I—I—"

"Don't hesitate about telling me," he urged. "You know we always share our secrets. It must be a man who is good and true, else he need not hope to carry off my little home partner."

"Oh, I'm not going to leave you now, father—not for a long time. He mustn't ask me that."

"Who is he?"

Again she hesitated, finally confessing:

"I—I—don't know."

Calvin Webster stared hard at her for some moments, and then he burst into a laugh.

"This is really humorous!" he declared. "My little girl fancies herself in love, and yet she does not know whom she loves! If that is the case, I don't think there is any great danger of your leaving me at present."

"But, father, there are—two!"

He started to his feet.

"Two?" he gasped.

She nodded, her cheeks being crimson as a peony.

"Well, this sounds to me like a joke!" declared the broker. "Girls do not usually fall in love with two men."

"This is an unusual case."

"I should say as much. But who are they?"

"Robert Booth is one."

A sudden cloud darkened his face.

"Booth! I don't know—"

"Nor do I," she swiftly broke in. "He is such a handsome fellow, and he seems so good and brave! I know ten girls who are crazy to win him."

"And he—"

"Does not seem to care for any of them."

"Does he care for you?"

"I think so. You know mother favors him, now that I will not have Count Muriadto. She says Robert is the best Yankee she knows, if one wants to fling one's self away on an American."

The cloud deepened on the broker's face.

"Your mother's ideas are not always right. I am free to confess I do not fancy Robert Booth

so very much. If I have heard correctly, he has the reputation of being a rounder."

"What is that?"

"A man about town, and I would scarcely care to give my innocent little child—my pure garden rose—into the care of such a person."

"But I am sure he cannot be so bad, father," she protested, the chivalry in her nature aroused. "He has always seemed to me like a fine fellow."

"I do not positively say he is not. Who is the other?"

"Harold St. Clair."

Calvin Webster's face cleared somewhat.

"That is better," he acknowledged. "I know something of St. Clair, and he seems like a gentleman. Which one do you care for most?"

"I—I don't know."

"Then you cannot be very much in love."

"I did think it was Harold."

"You *did* think so."

"Yes, until—until—"

"What?"

"I heard some things about him."

"What did you hear?"

"Oh, some horrible stories!"

"Perhaps they are not true."

"I'm afraid they are."

"What makes you think so?"

"I—I asked Robert."

"And he said what?"

"Oh, he tried not to say anything about it, but I made him tell me the truth."

"What did he tell you?"

"Enough to make me fear the stories are not false."

Calvin Webster walked up and down the room, pausing to question her again.

"Do you really believe these stories?"

"I don't know what to believe."

"I will take the trouble to investigate. If they are not true, you might think more of Harold than you do of Booth, eh?"

"I—I believe so."

"Irma, I scarcely think you care enough for either of these young men to make the case a serious one. You have good sense enough not to plunge into any foolish affair, I trust. The man you are to marry must be square, honorable and a gentleman. Added to that, you must love him above all others. Child, your head is harboring some foolish fancies, for your heart is not touched. Don't be in a hurry about choosing."

"If I wait too long, mother will have me married off to some horrid foreigner. I'm an American, and I believe in America for the Americans."

Webster smiled.

"Patriotic little soul! Well, I must do some writing now. Good-night, dearest."

She kissed him and left him alone in the library.

There was a ring at the doorbell, and the servant brought her a card.

Harold St. Clair was waiting for her in the parlor.

She hesitated but a moment, and then she said:

"Tell him I will see him presently."

Her heart was really bounding excitedly and her cheeks were flushed with unusual color when she descended the stairs. She did not analyze her own feelings, else she might have hesitated about trusting herself just then.

Harold arose to greet her as she entered the parlor. She had determined to be very reserved, but she could not bring herself to greet him coolly.

"I have come to see you about an unpleasant matter," he said. "Those stories—"

"Oh, don't speak of them!" she entreated, feeling a sudden repugnance for the subject. "Sit down, Mr. St. Clair. Let's talk of something more pleasant."

"I cannot rest so long as there is a shadow over me," he declared. "It is not an easy thing to trace gossip of such a nature, but I have succeeded in discovering the source from which those stories originated. If given time, I can prove them all false."

"I believe you," she said.

And then she entreated him once more to speak of other things. He did so, and they were soon enjoying a pleasant chat. She felt herself more and more drawn to him, and she began to wonder how it was she ever fancied she cared for Robert Booth.

Suddenly the portieres parted and a man stepped into the parlor.

It was Broadway Bob!

CHAPTER VI.

FICKLE LOVE.

THERE was a sneer on the handsome face of the Rounder as he fixed his eyes on Harold.

"Well," said Bob, slowly, "I must say you have a great deal of cheek, St. Clair!"

"I return the compliment," flashed Harold.

"You are an intruder here!"

"And you dare visit a house you have been invited to keep from until you can wipe the stains off your name!"

"There are no stains on my name."

Bob smiled significantly.

"You make a bold bluff."
"You tried to stain my name," exclaimed Harold, who was now on his feet; "but you failed. I know the truth—you are the one who has circulated the lies about me!"

"What?"
The Rounder advanced in a menacing manner.

"Exactly what I say!" returned Harold, taking a step forward.

"I have a mind to force those words down your throat!"

"That is something you cannot do, Robert Booth! I am ready to meet you on equal terms at any time and any place."

Broadway Bob's fists were clinched and his eyes glaring, but the other did not quail in the least.

"Were there not a lady present—" began Bob.

"You cannot regret it more than I," came quickly from Harold's lips. "But, as there is a lady present, perhaps you will have good breeding enough to retire, as I happen to be first to call."

"I don't know. I hate to turn my back on a man like you. You are—"

"What?"
Irma stepped between them.

"Gentlemen, stop!" she said. "You are forgetting yourselves!"

"It is true," confessed Harold. "I beg a thousand pardons."

Bob bowed coldly.

"Pardon is granted," he said.

That brought Harold round in an instant.

"I ask nothing of you!" he cried.

"Very well," said the Rounder. "I will see you later." Then he bowed himself out of the room.

"Now is my time to test my power," he muttered, as he made his way to the library, where Calvin Webster was writing. "To-night will show who is the best man in the fight."

"I am so sorry this occurred, Miss Webster!" said Harold, when Bob Booth was gone. "I know I should have restrained myself, but the sight of that man filled my blood with fire."

"I do not blame you at all, Harold," she declared. "You did what any man would have done, and I admire you all the more. I think my eyes are open at last."

His heart leaped.

"What do you mean by that, Irma?" he asked, hope glowing in his eyes. "Is it true you really care a little for me?"

She bowed her head, the warm color returning to her cheeks.

"Oh, I have never denied I cared a little for you; and now—"

"And now?" he urged, securing her hand.

She turned partially away.

"You are silent," he went on swiftly. "That gives me reason to hope. Irma, I asked you to read the secret of your own heart. Have you done so? If it is true, what has your heart told you? My darling,"—suddenly growing bold—

"I love you truly, dearly! Isn't it possible you love me in return? I am sure you do, little one! Give me the right to protect—to call you mine! I will protect and shield you from every ill! I will—"

"Wait!" she entreated, trying to draw her hand from his. "I must not say now, for—"

"Now is the time," he urged. "Why should you put it off longer? Do you still doubt me? Can it be there is a fear that the lying stories you have heard are true?"

"Not the least, Harold; I believe none of them!"

"Then why do you hesitate? Confess that you love me, darling!"

"Yes, Harold," she whispered, her flushed face in her hands; "yes, I confess!"

He barely heard her words, but he caught her in his arms and kissed her.

"And you will never doubt me?"

"Never!"

What a great happiness was his at that moment! He had won her at last! He had heard her red lips confess her love!

"Irma," he cried, softly, "you have made me the happiest man in all New York—the happiest in the world! You shall never regret your love—I swear it! The future holds much that is bright with sunshine and joy for us! No shadow shall ever come between us again!"

"No, never again!"

They little dreamed how close the shadows were.

"I was in doubt for so long," she confessed; "but the truth was revealed to me when I saw you facing Robert Booth. There was nothing but honest indignation in your eyes, and then I knew I loved you!"

"Then I am thankful he came here!"

She nestled in his arms, for she was like an innocent child. Her whole sweet face was aglow with the light of love. Again he bent and pressed his lips to hers.

A cry of anger caused them to start and turn toward the portieres.

The curtains were parted and Calvin Webster strode into the room, Broadway Bob pausing at the door.

There was a strange look on the broker's face—a look that Harold did not understand.

"Young man," said Webster, "you will leave my house without delay."

And Broadway Bob stood smiling between the parted portieres!

Harold was astonished.

"Mr. Webster—" he commenced.

"Not a word, sir!" commanded the aroused father. "I have heard and seen quite enough of you! Go!"

"But I must ask an explanation. Why—"

"I understand Mrs. Webster asked you not to return here until you had cleared your name of the disgrace upon it. You disobeyed her request."

"I deny there is any disgrace upon my name! If you will listen to the falsehoods of that smiling rascal there"—pointing at Bob—"I am astonished! You must know his reputation! Why should you allow his lies to count against me?"

"You are not on trial here. Will you be kind enough to go?"

Irma started forward.

"Father," she cried, "you are unjust!"

"Irma," came firmly from his lips, "you will leave this room!"

She had never seen him thus, and she was terrified.

"Leave the room!" he repeated.

She dared not disobey.

"Good-by, Harold," she faltered.

"Good-night, Irma," he replied. "Do not forget!"

"You need have no fear; I shall not change."

A moment later she was gone.

"Now," exclaimed Harold, "give me a fair show—let me know what this man has said about me, that I may force the lies down his dastardly throat!"

"I have no further time to waste with you, young man," asserted the broker. "You will take your hat and cane and go at once. If there is further parley, I shall call a servant and have you forcibly ejected."

"Then I will go," came bitterly from the young man's lips. "If I were given half a show, I could convince you of your unjustness. Good-day."

As he walked from the room, Bob stepped aside to let him pass. He felt an almost irresistible desire to fling himself on the smiling rascal, but, holding himself in check, took his hat and cane and quietly departed.

This treatment rankled like a poisoned arrow in Harold's heart. He did not understand it at all, and he resolved to know just what it meant.

The only thing that buoyed him up and kept him from some rash act was the belief that Irma loved him and would remain true to him.

"I can trust her!" he thought. "And I will win her in the end. Robert Booth shall not capture the prize. She gave me her word, and there is nothing but honesty and innocence in her dear little heart."

He spent the following two days trying to find Broadway Bob, being fully determined to make the Rounder explain.

But he did not meet Bob alone.

Near night of the second day, Harold went for a ride in the Park, as was his custom. He was a fine horseman, riding as if a part of his animal.

As he entered the Park at Fifty-ninth street and Fifth avenue, a low cry escaped his lips.

He saw a handsome carriage rolling toward him. In the carriage were two persons, and he recognized them both.

One was Broadway Bob.

The other was Irma Webster!

Harold could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes, but there was no doubt about it. Irma was in the carriage with Robert Booth.

The Rounder looked up and saw his enemy on horseback, and just the ghost of an icy triumphant smile across his face. His white teeth gleamed beneath the well-trained mustache, and he seemed to look directly through St. Clair.

Harold was staring in a maze.

Irma raised her eyes and looked straight at him. In a moment his hat was lifted.

Then a flood of crimson leaped to his cheeks, for not the quiver of an eyelash indicated she had seen his salute or recognized him!

It was a dead end!

Harold St. Clair nearly fell from his saddle, so great was his astonishment and consternation.

The carriage rolled on, and the young man's horse carried him down the bridge-path, but there was a dazed look in his eyes and a strange, sickening sensation at his heart.

CHAPTER VII.

BLACKMAIL.

"MR. WEBSTER is busy," declared the office boy. "Your business must be highly important, if he sees you."

"Well, I should say it is important!" nodded the rough-looking stranger who had asked to see the broker.

"Will you send in your name?"

"Tell him it's an old friend."

"But I must have your name."

"All right; it's Frank Wallace."

The boy disappeared into Calvin Webster's private office, but quickly returned, saying:

"He says he does not know you, sir, and he cannot give you any time to-day."

"Don't know me!" howled Wallace. "Just go back and ask if he doesn't remember the time I saved him from drowning. Go ahead now!"

When the boy opened the office door again, the stranger forced himself right into the broker's private room. Calvin Webster looked up in surprise.

"How are you?" nodded Wallace.

"Sir," said the broker, "I don't know you."

"That's your misfortune," assured the rough-looking stranger, as he secured the only remaining chair and sat down, causing the office boy to gasp with amazement. "You'll know me before long."

"Hang your impudence!" growled the broker.

"My time is money. Now you are in here, make haste about stating your business."

"You may go, kid," said Wallace, speaking to the gaping boy. "Close the door."

The boy obeyed.

"I have come to borrow some money," declared the cheeky stranger.

"Are you a beggar?"

"No, sir. This is to be a business transaction. You are to let me have the money for something?"

"What?"

"Silence."

"I don't understand you. Come, come! you are taking up my time! Get out!"

"Not till I get the money."

"How much do you want?"

"About ten thousand dollars."

Calvin Webster wheeled in his chair and stared hard at the visitor.

"Where is your dynamite?"

The man laughed.

"I'm no dynamite crank," he replied. "I hain't goin' to blow the office up. All the same I mean business."

The broker reached to touch a bell, but his wrist was caught by some strong fingers.

"Don't you do it, Webster, old boy!" advised Frank Wallace. "If you do, I will have to tell the public about a certain piece of paper to which you signed the name of Benton, Frazer and Co. The public would be mightily interested in that little story."

The broker turned pale and fell back in his chair.

"What are you saying?" he finally demanded, his voice sounding harsh and unnatural.

"Is it necessary to repeat? I might tell them about a woman who lives in a certain cheap tenement on the West Side—a woman who now bears the name of Bell, but who was once known as Webster."

"What is your game?" asked the broker, after a moment of silence.

Frank Wallace smiled and released his grip on the other's wrist.

"Now you are coming to your senses," he said.

"I am in need of money."

"If I refuse to let you have any—what?"

"I'll make Wall street too hot to hold you!"

"That is a threat!"

"Take it as such, if you like. I am here for business. I know all about a certain little forgery that kept you from ruin once upon a time, and I also know all about the woman who now calls herself Bell, but is better known as Red Madge."

"This is blackmail!" hissed Webster.

"Do you think so?"

"I know it!"

"All the same, you can't afford to have the world know these things."

"I can have you arrested and imprisoned."

"That will not silence my tongue."

"But—"

"But money will."

"For God's sake, how did you find out?"

The visitor smiled.

"I have a way," he declared.

"You have no proof of the charge of forgery?"

"Haven't I?"

"No."

"That's where you are mistaken."

"The check is destroyed."

"It was destroyed," confessed Wallace. "But the man who detected the forgery and could have ruined you at the time was an amateur photographer. He took a fancy to photograph that check."

"I do not believe it!"

"Here is a sample of his work, dear sir."

With that, the visitor placed a photograph of a check before the eyes of the broker, grinning in a malicious manner.

Calvin Webster was very pale.

"How much will you take for this?" he asked

"Ten thousand dollars."

"Are there any more like it?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"Several."

"How much will purchase them all?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

"And if I refuse to be bled?"

Frank Wallace shrugged his shoulders.

"The newspapers will pay well for a good sensational story," he retorted.

"Bring me every one of these things in your possession and I will talk business with you."

"All right; but I happen to need money just now, and I must have ten thousand to-day."

"You will not get ten cents!"

"Do you defy me?"

"I refuse to pay a cent to-day. Bring me all evidence in existence concerning this check, and then I will make you an offer."

"How about the Bell woman?"

"I care nothing about her. You cannot bleed me through such a channel."

"I may take a fancy to show this photograph to the managing editor of some newspaper."

"Then you will only get what he will pay for the story. If you bring me the mates to this, I will pay you more than any newspaper would."

A few minutes later, the strange visitor departed from the broker's office. Behind him he left a man whose head was bowed on his desk and who was shivering as if with a chill. At length, he lifted a white face, muttering:

"It has come at last, and just when I least dreamed it would! That one desperate act saved me from ruin then, but it may ruin me now. I had begun to believe there was no danger. Great Heaven! had I given way to my feelings to-day, I would have done anything to obtain possession of the proofs. It was only by the greatest effort I kept a steady nerve."

"That man was in disguise. I am sure the beard he wore was false. Who can he be? and how did he obtain possession of the proofs against me?"

"This is blackmail, but I dare not call on the police. If I wish to get out of the trap, I must rely on a private whom I can trust. I only know of one trustworthy man. I must see Dan Downing without delay."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DETECTIVE TRAPPED.

DISGUISED as a common Irish laborer, Double-voice Dan was shadowing Broadway Bob. The Rounder led Dan a hot chase, but the ferret was not to be thrown off the scent. At length, the detective saw Bob enter a saloon away over on the West Side, not far from the river.

"I wonder what he can want in Butch McGode's dive?" muttered the ferret. "I will follow and find out."

Apparently Dan was well under the influence of liquor when he staggered into McGode's, although he was neither boisterous or helpless. His entrance seemed to attract very little notice.

"What'll yer hev?" growled the bartender, singling out the disguised detective. "Beer?"

Dan nodded.

"Not thot Oi loike th' scoof, do yez moind," he said; "but whin a marn is full to th' chook wid whisky an' doon't hiv but five cints to kape oop th' footle wid, whot th' divvil will he do av he doon't drink beer, Oi dunno?"

He fished in his pockets until he discovered a nickel, all the while leering around at the assembled patrons of the place. It did not take him long to discover Broadway Bob, who was sitting in a dark corner and talking earnestly to a tough-looking man.

After making sure his game was there, Dan scarcely seemed to notice any one within the place. He drank his beer, falling into conversation with a man at the bar, who happened to be a German.

If Broadway Bob knew he was being shadowed, he did not betray the fact in any way. Still Dan had sized the Rounder up as a shrewd fellow, who was not by any means an ordinary crook. While being hand in glove with "shady" characters, Robert Booth managed to keep in society and was respected by many honest men.

After a time the Rounder arose and left the saloon by a side door.

Dan did not dare wait too long before he followed, for he feared Bob would give him the slip, so he actually tore himself from the exuberant German and staggered out.

He found himself in a narrow alley that ran down into the darkness between the ramshackle buildings. Looking around, he could see nothing of the man he was following.

Which way had Bob turned?

Looking down the alley, he saw a dark form pass a ray of light that came from a dirty and broken window.

It was Bob!

Like a cat the detective sneaked down the alley, crouching to pass beneath the window, so the light would not reveal to the Rounder that he was followed.

Dan seemed to have the eyes of an owl, for he could follow the movements of the man he was shadowing, even though it was so extremely dark down there.

The alley turned to the right, and Dan hastened forward gripping the butt of a ready revolver, for he knew not what snare lay in wait for his feet.

"This is a fine place to murder a man!" he thought. "The police would not get track of the crime very easy."

But he felt fully able to take care of himself.

He reached the corner in time to see the Rounder's dark form disappearing into a low doorway.

"He may be intending to give me the slip," muttered Dan. "It would be an easy thing to go in there and come out somewhere else."

He lost no time in reaching the doorway, which still stood wide open.

It was a strangely silent and deserted place down in that grim alley.

Looking in at the open doorway, Dan could see nothing. He wondered where the Rounder had gone, and for some moments he stood still, hesitating about the best course to pursue.

"I will go in," he finally decided. "If Bob Booth is one of the Tenderloin Tigers, he may lead me to the lair of the dreaded animals."

The "Tenderloin Tigers" were a desperate set of men who were banded together for the purpose of pillage and plunder. Their chosen "stamping ground" was the "Tenderloin District" in the heart of the great city, and they had made themselves hated and feared by honest men. The police had not been successful in bringing the chief criminals to justice and breaking up the band, and now Double-voice Dan had taken it upon himself to accomplish what the regulars fail to do.

The detective had reason to believe Broadway Bob was one of the terrible Tigers, and so he was shadowing the Rounder, hoping to strike a warm trail.

Having decided to enter the doorway, Dan hesitated no longer. Staggering a trifle and hiccupping like an intoxicated man, he entered, feeling his way along with one hand, while the other was on the butt of his revolver.

Suddenly the door closed behind him. He knew this did not happen by chance, and through his head flashed the thought that he had wandered into a trap. He stood still and listened.

In a moment, there came to his ear a soft rustling sound.

"Oi say," he called; "what th' divvil did yez warnt to be afther closin' th' dure for? Oi can't see me harnd before me face."

Then, with the silence of a moving cat, he shifted his position a few feet.

Dan had remarkably keen ears, and he heard some one cautiously crossing the floor toward the point where he had stood when he spoke. There was something about the cautious, creepy, snake-like sound that chilled his blood for a moment.

"I am in for a struggle," he told himself. "It means life or death, and the chances are against me."

He hesitated about his next move.

Suddenly, he heard his unknown companion go lunging forward at his side, and then a savage curse fell on his ears, telling him the other had discovered Dan had moved.

All at once, the detective was grasped by a pair of strong arms. It happened so unexpectedly that he was taken by surprise.

Dan was a trained athlete, and he immediately turned on his unseen foe.

Then a desperate battle began.

Neither man spoke a word. Round and round they turned, fighting with the silence of bulldogs. Just what his foe was trying to do, Dan was not able to comprehend, for the man did not appear to be endeavoring to injure him in any way.

Suddenly there was a tremor beneath their feet, and a moment later the floor gave way.

A cry of dismay broke from the lips of the detective's assailant, and he broke clear of Dan's grip, plainly trying to save himself from falling. He had been trying to cast Dan into the trap, but, by some miscalculation, he had blundered into it also.

Down went the detective and his unknown enemy.

They did not fall far.

For a moment after striking the ground, Dan was stunned, but he quickly rallied, knowing his life might depend upon his alertness.

Even though he had fallen into a trap, he was not the man to give up easily. If he was "wiped out," he meant to go under fighting like a man.

Losing no time, he crept from the spot beneath the trap.

The damp ground beneath his hands told him he was in a cellar, and in a moment he reached the wall. There he halted, his revolver in his hand.

All was silent in the cellar. He wondered what had happened to his unknown foe who fell through the trap with him.

Of a sudden, there was a slight noise, and then a surprising thing occurred.

A ray of light shot across the cellar, being focused on the spot beneath the trap-door.

The detective's enemy or enemies were armed with a dark lantern!

CHAPTER IX.

A DESPERATE BATTLE IN THE DARK.

A low exclamation of surprise came from the lips of Dan Downing's unseen foe when he discovered the detective was not beneath the trap.

Then the light began moving about, plainly in search for the trapped ferret.

When Dan was revealed, it was probable his foe would attempt to make short work of him.

"I must stop that," thought the detective.

A moment later, his revolver spoke, the report sounding fearfully loud within the confines of the cellar.

A jingle of broken glass and sudden darkness followed.

Dan had shot out the light!

In doing so, he betrayed for a moment his position, and a second shot sounded almost like the echo of his weapon.

A bullet fairly grazed his cheek and lodged in the wall behind him!

It was a close call for Dan.

The flash of his enemy's revolver showed the detective a man who crouched against the opposite wall. The man's face was bearded and there was a murderous gleam in his eyes.

"I am good for him, if there is only one," thought the undaunted ferret, as he swiftly and silently changed his position. "It is probable both of us will not go out of this cellar alive. This is a battle to the end!"

Gripping his revolver firmly, he listened, hoping to locate his foe by some sound. In this he was partially successful, and again he pulled trigger.

Barely had the weapon spoke when Dan sunk flat on the ground.

None too soon.

A fourth shot followed, and the bullet buried itself in the crumbling wall directly behind the place where Dan had been a moment before.

The flash of the weapon was a revelation to Dan.

He saw two men crouching at the opposite side of the cellar, one of whom wore a mask.

There were two of his enemies, instead of one!

He was fighting against odds.

"They will find me a hard man to down, just the same," he thought, as he crept along the wall a few feet. "This is not the first time I have bucked against odds."

He paused again, listening once more.

How still and dead everything seemed down there in that old cellar! The pistol-shots had not been heard outside, or, if they had, they attracted no attention.

Hushing his breath, Dan could only hear the beating of his own heart, which sounded abnormally loud just then. Still he knew his deadly foes were crouching in that very cellar, only waiting for a sound to tell them where to place their next bullet.

"More than one can play at this game," said Dan, inwardly. "My patience is as good as theirs."

Placing his back against the wall, he sat there on the ground, the self-cocking revolver resting on his right leg, his finger touching the trigger.

The minutes dragged by slowly, each one seeming like an hour. Ten minutes passed, and still the silence of death reigned in the cellar.

Suddenly, from above somewhere, a voice called down:

"Have you finished him, boys?"

It was the voice of Broadway Bob!

"Not yet!" Dan cried, in reply. "I will live to do for you, Bob Booth!"

A curse came back, and two revolvers spoke in the cellar, both of the detective's foes taking a shot at the point from which his voice had seemed to come.

The ferret heard the bullets strike the stones and mortar above his head, and then, like a flash, he fired two shots in return.

A cry of pain rung through the cellar!

He had not wasted his lead!

With a feeling of triumph in his heart he shifted his position once more.

"I'll be in the ring to the finish he thought."

"When they attempt to knock me out in this fashion they have tackled a comfortable job. This is not exactly sport, but I have been in as bad a scrape many a time."

He settled down and listened again.

His enemies were very silent, and his imagination pictured them creeping toward him inch by inch.

Then he remembered there were but two shots left in his revolver, as he had already discharged the weapon four times.

Feeling in the side-pocket of his coat, his fingers encountered another cylinder that he knew would fit the weapon, and he was certain it was properly loaded, as it was his plan to carry an extra cylinder for emergencies.

When he had fired the remaining two shots he would make the shift.

Of a sudden he heard a faint whispering at the opposite side of the cellar.

His foes were holding a consultation.

Locating them as well as he could, he fired again, moving quickly to the left when he had done so.

Crack! crack!

There were two shots in return, and he dimly saw the outlines of his two enemies.

Still he remained uninjured.

But the singular battle in the dark cellar could not continue indefinitely. In time, somebody must get the worst of it.

If Dan had known of any way to escape from the cellar, he would have done so without delay, for he did not relish his position at all. Even though fortune had seemed to stand by him all his life, it might prove fickle in this emergency, and that meant that his enemies would triumph. In such a case Double-voice Dan, the dreaded enemy of rascality, would disappear from the world in a most unaccountable manner. The secret of his death might never be made public.

Still, he did not speculate much. He was too busy trying to locate his foes, who, like himself, changed their positions every time they fired their revolvers.

Suddenly a thought struck him.

Why could he not use his ventriloquial powers to deceive them? Many a time the gift of "throwing his voice" enabled him to escape from the most deadly traps, and now it should serve him again.

The most skilled ventriloquist is only able to make it seem that he "throws his voice," for he does nothing of the kind. He simply muffles and disguises it in such a way that it is impossible to tell from what point it proceeds. Then, aided by his own looks and gestures, he deceives his auditors into believing the sounds come from a certain point.

It will be readily seen that such a deception would be most difficult in the dark, for the ventriloquist could not aid in the deception by any gesture or look of his own.

But Dan's ability was quite out of the ordinary and he knew he could puzzle his foes completely.

"Hello!" he called.

No living being but himself could have told from what point the word was spoken.

Plainly his enemies were puzzled, for a dead silence followed.

"Hello there!" he called again.

Then he heard a whispering that told him where his foes were.

"Now I will completely fool them," he thought.

Then he lifted his revolver and fired his last shot, repeating his ruse of getting out of the way as quickly as possible.

He was not an instant too soon.

From the opposite side of the cellar came two spouts of flame, and two reports followed.

But Dan was untouched.

However, he uttered a groan that seemed to come from the spot where he crouched when he fired the last time.

Even as he did this, his nimble fingers were shifting the useless cylinder of his revolver for the loaded one, and he was ready for business once more.

Again he groaned. It was a dismal, blood-chilling sound, seeming like that of a man in mortal agony. Such a sound in the darkness of the dark old cellar was doubly horrifying.

He heard his foes whispering again.

"We've plinked him!"

The words came plainly to his ears.

"I think so," was the answer. "Curse him! I have one of his bullets in my shoulder!"

"Hear him groan!"

"He won't groan ag'in arter I git at him! I'm goin' over there an' finish him off."

"What'll you do?"

"Cut his throat!"

Dan Downing's teeth came together suddenly. It was life or death, and he no longer felt any hesitation about placing his bullets where they would be the most effective. Self-defense is the first law of nature.

"Say," he called, making his voice seem to come from the point where he was supposed to be lying wounded, "you fellows have done for me."

One of the men laughed harshly, triumphantly, and then he heard them slowly crossing the cellar.

Silently he crept toward the point where they had been a few moments before, intending to turn the tables on them.

"We'll do for you!" one of the villains retorted. "This is your last job, Dan Downing!"

Again calling his ventriloquial powers into play, he begged for mercy in a most pitiful manner.

"Hanged if he hai't squealin'!" chuckled one of the two ruffians, with fiendish satisfaction. "It has been said no man could make him beg."

Suddenly, a surprising thing occurred. The sound of a blow reached Dan's ears, and then he heard a desperate struggle taking place within the cellar.

At first, he could not understand it, but the truth of the matter suddenly dawned upon him.

By some strange mischance, his enemies had mistaken each other for him, and they were engaged in a desperate hand-to-hand encounter.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE FOR BROADWAY BOB.

FEELING not a little surprised by the unexpected turn events had taken, Dan stood listening to the sounds of battle. There were dull, sodden blows, and he heard the panting breathing of the deluded men as they fought like tigers.

He knew this could not last long, for they would soon discover their astonishing blunder.

"Help, Jim!" called one. And then he shrieked:

"My God! I'm cut!"

Dan Downing shuddered a bit.

The battle suddenly ceased, and then he heard two sodden falls.

How had it ended?

He heard the wheezing breathing of one of the men, but no sound seemed to come from the other.

With his hand against the crumbling wall, the detective moved slowly along.

Of a sudden he discovered a break in the wall, and a closer examination convinced him he had reached a passage that led from the cellar.

Only a moment did he hesitate.

"My enemies entered by this passage," he thought. "That is why they clung to this side of the cellar until I lured them across by a trick. If I follow this, I may find a way out."

He listened again.

The wheezing breathing still sounded in the cellar, and he heard something creeping slowly along the ground.

"Good-by," he said, mentally.

Then he started along the passage.

He felt his way along carefully, not knowing what kind of a trap he might stumble into. He did not proceed far before he came to what he believed was another cellar.

Dan paused long enough to light a match.

As the tiny blaze flared up, he glanced around, making an instantaneous survey of his surroundings.

As he had thought, the passage had led him into a second cellar, which was filled with old boxes, beer barrels and other stuff.

To his left, he saw a flight of stairs that led upward to a closed door.

The light caused several rats to go scampering and squealing across the cellar.

The match went out and the dauntless Double-voice detective was again in the dark. He had already decided on the course he would pursue, and, without delay, he made for the stairs, up which he softly crept.

He heard voices in the room above.

"I wonder if I am in for more trouble here?" he thought. "These people must have heard the shooting in the cellar, so they are probably a part of the gang."

The stairs creaked somewhat, but he did not pause until he had reached the door.

There he listened.

"I don't hear any more shots," said the voice of a female. "They must have finished him."

"Yes, I think so," was the reply, the second speaker being Broadway Bob. "This night ends the career of Double-voice Dan. We will not bother ourselves about him after this."

"Do you really think so?" softly chuckled the man on the stairs. "That is where you fool yourself, dear boy. Dan Downing is destined to cause you any amount of trouble before you are through with him."

"Why were you so determined to have this man put out of the way?" asked the woman.

"Because he had become our worst foe. Not only had he started in on the task the police failed to accomplish, breaking up the Tigers, but he was engaged by your dear husband of other days to track down and pull in our representative, Mr. Frank Wallace, otherwise known as Game Gus."

"Engaged by whom?"

"Your former husband, Calvin Webster."

"Is it true?"

"It is dead straight. With the information I obtained and a photograph of the forged check, Gus attempted to squeeze old Webster, as we planned. The old fellow appeared very docile, but the moment Gus turned his back, he put Dan Downing on his track. Downing would soon have obtained evidence enough against us to jug the leaders for various jobs, and that would have left Cal Webster at liberty to leisurely close up his business and skip to parts unknown. We were compelled to do for Double-voice Dan."

"Many thanks for the explanation," silently laughed the man on the cellar stairs. "Now I fully understand the game. Oh, I am playing in luck!"

"What will be done with the detective's body?" asked the woman, who was evidently as cool and as depraved as her companion.

"Burr and Jones have a pick and shovel with them. They are going to bury him in the cellar and then cover the place with barrels and boxes. They are probably selecting a spot now."

"You would be a bit surprised if you knew the truth," thought the detective behind the door. "It's one or both of your own pals you may be called on to bury. Dan Downing is still on deck. He has a singular habit of bobbing up serenely."

In truth, it seemed almost impossible to get the best of the "Ventriloquist Vidocq," as Double-voice Dan was sometimes called. Many times had his enemies fancied him dead, but like the famed Phenix, he seemed to arise from his own ashes.

Dan wondered who the woman could be, for Calvin Webster had not fully unboomed him-

self to the detective, having failed to mention his former wife, a creature who had led him a wild life and from whom he had been divorced.

"If I could get to see her face, I might know her," thought the ferret, who had the features of nearly all New York's crooks, high and low, photographed in his memory.

He contemplated opening the door and stepping in upon the two, but a desire to hear more of their conversation prevented the move. He did not know but they might speak of something that would prove of the utmost importance to him.

The man paced up and down the room, while the woman watched him. Now and then they would listen for further shooting or some sound from the cellar.

"It is strangely still down there," muttered Broadway Bob, uneasily. "I don't like it. I wonder if anything has gone wrong. I should think one of the boys would come up and tell me what they have done with the cursed bloodhound."

"It must be they have fixed him," said the woman. "Burr and Jones never slip up on such a job."

"They are reliable, and neither one fears the devil himself. I admire them for that. They have done more than one rough piece of work for the gang."

"So my dear husband of the pleasant past refused to be squeezed? He was always an obstinate man. He used to try to deprive me of all my little innocent pleasures. Why, he even insisted that I must come in nights before twelve o'clock! Any one knows there is not a bit of sport going in New York until after eleven at night. I suppose I did scandalize the poor soul most fearfully."

"But he was not so wealthy then, eh?"

"Not by any means! Had he been, I might have knuckled enough to keep in with him. He was able to live comfortably, but he objected when I blowed a hundred or so on some fancy. That made me dead sore."

"I should think you would have struck him for scads long before this."

"I might had I kept any track of him; but, up to date, Red Madge has always been pretty flush."

Red Madge!

Double-voice Dan knew the woman now. She was one of the most famous female criminals of the great city—a veritable queen of the crooks.

"So she is a sample of the associates of elegant Robert Booth, the handsome pet of swell society!" thought the detective. "How many of Booth's fashionable friends dream he is a confidence man, a swindler, a crook of the most pronounced sort? I have a grip on him now, and it will not be long before his photo is added to Byrnes's little collection. His tony friends can go down and look at it."

"I wonder what those men can be doing down in the cellar all this time?" impatiently cried Broadway Bob. "Not a sound can be heard now."

"You had better go down and see," suggested Red Madge.

"Not I. I don't care to help them plant the corpse. But I am going to open this door and see if I can hear anything then."

Dan heard the Rounder advancing toward the cellar door and the detective instantly decided on the course he would pursue.

"Isn't it possible they may have met their match in this fly sharp?" questioned Madge.

"Don't fool yourself by thinking so; Dan Downing will never trouble us again," declared Bob, as he opened the cellar door.

"My dear fellow, you are talking through your hat," said the detective, as he coolly stepped into the room.

CHAPTER XI.

DAN DISAPPEARS.

THE Rounder fell back, literally gasping for breath, but being unable to utter a sound for some seconds, his face turning pale and his eyes bulging. Never in all his life had he been so utterly amazed and dumfounded.

Red Madge gave a little scream, looking as if she saw a spirit.

And the detective enjoyed the situation.

Closing the door behind him, Dan placed his back against it, glancing swiftly around the room. There were two other doors, and he decided in a moment on the one he believed would lead to open air and liberty.

He intended to leave the room by that door when he departed.

The ferret was as cool as an icicle, looking as if he were perfectly at ease, even though neither hand had sought a weapon. But Dan could "draw" with the swiftness of a Western desperado, a fact which was demonstrated when the Rounder made a motion toward his hip pocket.

A brace of revolvers seemed to leap into Dan Downing's hands, and the muzzles of the weapons were turned toward the woman crook and her companion.

"Slow and easy, Robert," advised the Double-voice Detective. "I am in this little game,

and I hold a pair of sixes. A good bluff hand, eh?"

Bob did not dare produce his own weapon, and he fell back another step, his eyes glittering.

"You infernal devil!" he said, slowly. "Will nothing kill you?"

"Never," was the reply. "It will take *something* to do that little job. I intend remaining on top of earth for some time to come."

"Well, I have no row with you."

"Oh, you haven't! That sounds nicely! Perhaps I have a score to settle with you."

"You are not an authorized officer of the law."

"Is that so? Even if it is, I wish to tell you I have brought better men than you to justice."

"Why do you trouble me?"

"Does it trouble you to be watched? An honest man can stand scrutiny. But you are a rascal, Booth—a sleek villain. Your proper place is behind the bars."

"By the gods, you shall pay dearly for this! I will—"

"Now, what will you do? Just go right ahead and say it. I am interested in your future plans."

"The sooner your interest ceases the better it will be for you. I am no criminal to be spotted like a sneak-thief!"

"Now, is that so?"

"You devil!"

"Hard names break no bones."

"My hands would break your bones, if I could get hold of you!"

"Even in that you are mistaken."

"He was listening at the door," cried the woman.

"Perhaps you are right, my dear Madge," bowed Dan. "At any rate, I could have no doubt of you. You were on my little blacklist at least seven years ago."

The woman glared at him fiercely. Although dissipation had left marks on her features, her face and form were still attractive. In former years, she had been called one of the great beauties of the metropolis.

However, queen of criminals though she were, she had managed to avoid arrest on any serious charge, and the fund of ready money at her command had prevented her doing short periods of time.

For this reason, her past connections had slipped from Dan Downing's memory. Now, however, he was quite aware he was in the employ of the man who had at one time been forced to seek legal separation from the woman, whose indiscreet acts—not to use a harsher term—were bringing shame and ridicule upon him.

"So you were listening at the door!" grated Broadway Bob. "Little good will what you heard do you?"

"Do you really think so?"

"I know so. You could prove nothing, if you escaped; but I scarcely think you will leave this place in a hurry."

"Then I shall leave it leisurely. It makes very little difference to me."

"You are cool, because you think you have the upper hand. That's where you fool yourself."

"How do you like the looks of my toys? They are both loaded with good cartridges and either one is good for six lives. I feel very comfortable, having them in my possession."

"But I have plenty of pals at my call."

"You won't call."

"What makes you think so?"

"Because I hold the drop, as they say in the wild and woolly West. If you yapped, I might take a fancy to see what kind of an opening a bullet would make in your system."

"That's all bluff. You wouldn't dare shoot."

"That remark shows you do not know me very well, Robert. Dare! My dear rascal, do you imagine there is anything I can do that I dare not do? You set two of your dogs on me a short time ago. One of them tried to cast me down into the cellar where the other was waiting to finish me. The first made a miscalculation and went through the floor with me. That upset their plans somewhat, but the two of them attempted to finish me. I am here. Where are your tools?"

These words made the Rounder furious.

Suddenly, one of the doors opened and two men stepped into the room. They were both desperate looking ruffians, and Dan knew them instantly as "wanted" men.

When these fellows saw the detective, they started back, uttering exclamations of alarm.

"It's Downin'!"

"Double-voice Dan!"

Then looks of fierce satisfaction overspread their faces, and both shouted for help, at the same time producing weapons.

"That settles your hash, Dan Downing!" exultantly cried Broadway Bob. "There will be ten men here within as many seconds!"

Dan knew the crisis had arrived. It would not do to retreat into the cellar, for he would still be in a trap. If he could only reach the door he believed opened on a road to liberty!

In another instant, a yell broke from his lips and he sprang forward.

"Stop him!" roared the Rounder.

Bob set the example, but Dan had thrust his revolvers out of sight and caught up a chair. With this weapon, he sent Bob Booth reeling to the floor, after which, he hurled it at the other two rascals.

Reaching the door, he tore it open and bounded through. The cries which came to his ears were those of triumph, and a sudden suspicion that he had made a false step assailed him.

Through a dark passage he plunged, hearing his foes in pursuit. He came upon another door and flung himself against it, bursting it open.

"This way!" he heard Broadway Bob shouting to his pals. "He can't slip us now!"

"We will see about that!" grated Dan.

He suspected the trap that lay before him.

Reaching an outer door, he flung it open and then slammed it shut behind him.

Broadway Bob and his allies were in close pursuit, but they paused when they reached the outer door.

"He cannot escape from the yard in a week!" exultantly asserted the Rounder. "The fence is too high for any man to scale, and there is nothing to assist him. He will make a fight for it here."

They knew what that meant, and they were in no particular hurry about rushing out into the yard. As a fighter, Dan Downing was feared by the best of them, and now he was cornered, they knew he would be doubly desperate.

For some moments they talked over the situation, carefully preparing their plans and getting their weapons ready for instant use.

Then Broadway Bob cautiously opened the door and led the way, his pals following closely.

Out into the dark yard they sallied, just as they heard a voice calling to them. They saw a dark figure advancing across the yard and they were on the point of opening the attack when a strange voice cried:

"This way! this way! I saw him run over into that corner there!"

"Who in blazes are you?" exclaimed Broadway Bob.

"Why, I'm Sleek. I was watching for Downing, and I saw him come out."

The Rounder was suspicious.

"Turn the light on him, Dave," he commanded.

The next moment one of the men flashed the light of a dark lantern on the man they had found in the yard.

The face and form of the Shadow Sneak was revealed.

"By Moses! it is Sleek!" broke from Bob's lips. "How in thunder did you come here, man? I don't understand it at all."

"I am simply attending to my duty, sir," assured the Grand street detective, rubbing his hands together. "I presume that is what you engaged me for."

"And your duty—"

"To watch Dan Downing."

"That brought you here? How did you get into this yard?"

"Dropped from the top of the fence there when I saw Downing come out."

"You must have the eyes of a hawk to recognize him in this darkness."

"I heard him speak to himself, and I recognized his voice."

"What were you on the fence for?"

"Trying to devise some means of getting into this building, sir. I knew Downing was in there somewhere."

"Well," said Bob, "you may be a shrewder man than I thought. Otherwise, I don't understand how you located Double-voice Dan here. But, even though you could drop into this yard, Downing couldn't drop out of it. Did you see him go toward that corner?"

"Yes."

"Then come on, boys. He must be crouching behind that barrel over there. We will soon rout him out."

He led the way to the corner, but Dan Downing was not found there. Every inch of the yard was searched, and retreat into the house being carefully guarded, still the detective was not found.

He had mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DETECTIVE'S DARING STRATAGEM.

BROADWAY BOB and his pals were both amazed and enraged. They could not understand how Double-voice Dan had given them the slip so effectively.

"It's jest like ther cuss," declared one of the old offenders, who had been twice sent up through the efforts of Dan Downing. "He's slicker than grease. Never yet was a trap that'd hold him."

The Rounder again questioned Bob Sleek closely, but the Sneak Detective was ready with his answers. He was certain he saw Downing rush toward the corner of the yard where the barrel stood.

"Did you watch him then?"

"No; I dropped into the yard. I didn't see him afterward."

"Well, he is gone," Booth confessed, with

reluctance. "There is no doubt about that. Just how he worked the trick does not appear."

They returned disconsolately into the house.

Red Madge was waiting for them.

"Have you downed him?" she eagerly asked.

"He got away," acknowledged Bob.

Then the woman broke into a torrent of such language that even those who knew her best were astonished.

"He will cause us no end of trouble," she finished. "He must be killed, if I have to do the job!"

"If the whole police force are not able to get at the gang, I fancy we will prove too much for any one man," said Bob. Then he uttered a low exclamation of disgust when he discovered Sleek was with them, his ears wide open to catch every word.

After this there was little delay in getting rid of the Grand street sharp, for they dared not talk freely before him. They knew his treacherous nature too well. Booth made an appointment with him for the following day, and Sleek was sent away to search for Dan Downing, being instructed to shadow the Ventriloquist Detective as soon as the latter was found.

Burr and Jones, the two thugs with whom Dan Downing had engaged in a desperate encounter in the cellar, were forgotten for the moment, but Burr soon appeared. He came staggering into the room where the assembled rascals were, his clothes torn and covered with dirt, while he was weak from loss of blood. The moment he appeared he fell in a senseless heap.

Examination showed he was wounded in a manner that might prove fatal, and a physician was at once sent for, while some of the men entered the cellar to look after Jones.

They found the second thug weakly trying to creep along the passage from one cellar to the other. He, also, was cut in a terrible manner, having lost a large amount of blood.

The doctor dressed the wounds of both men, but would not say either of them could recover.

In the mean time guards had been stationed on every hand to give warning if the police attempted a raid. For all of this the toughs did not feel at all at ease, and they lost little time in abandoning that vicinity.

That night there was a gathering of the Terrible Tigers in the secret underground apartment where they had their headquarters.

The light of several red-globed lamps fell on a singular scene.

In the place of masks the assembled crooks wore an arrangement that made it seem as if the heads of tigers were set upon the shoulders of human beings. There were thirteen of them, the odd one being a woman.

They assembled silently, and one who seemed to be their leader called them to order, addressing them first. They listened with the greatest gravity, no one interrupting or offering a suggestion in any manner.

Various things were spoken of, and then the matter that brought them so hastily together was called to their notice.

"We have an enemy who is causing us great trouble," said the chief. "He is a dangerous foe, and we have assembled to decide upon some plan of disposing of him. I am speaking of the private detective known as Dan Downing, or Double-voice Dan."

A muttered growl went around the circle of Tigers, which plainly expressed their feelings toward the famous Go-It-Alone Detective.

"This fellow is no ordinary man," continued the chief. "What happened this night proves that. He can fight like a wildcat, and he does not fear the very devil. But, worst of all, no trap seems efficient in holding him. He bids defiance to the best-laid snares, and just when it seems an easy thing to crush him, he vanishes. Now, we must form a grand combine that shall put him out of the way. This must be done before we attempt any further operations on the Webster case. It does not work to select two or three to dispose of Dan Downing, while the others attend to the regular business. That has been tried. If we all unite in jumping on him, some of us must succeed in crushing him."

Not all, however, were agreed on this point, and a discussion arose, which was indulged in pretty freely, various views being advanced.

Suddenly there was a rap at the heavy door of the underground apartment.

The Tigers started and looked from one to another, astonishment and alarm expressed in the eyes which showed through the holes in the strange masks.

The knock was repeated.

It was the private signal known only, as they supposed, to the members of the band. As there were but thirteen regular members who ever gained admittance to that cellar, and thirteen were now present, their consternation can be readily understood.

"It's a trap!" hissed the chief. "The police must have dropped down on the place!"

"We must take flight by the secret passage!" whispered another.

"Open the door," commanded the chief. "Then I will look through the peep-hole and see who is knocking."

Two of the Tigers hastened to what seemed

the solid wall, but their ready fingers found and opened a concealed door, beyond which a dark and narrow passage was revealed.

Then the chief opened a small aperture in the heavy door and peered through.

"Who's there?" he called.

"Damon," was the reply.

"Let's see your face."

Beyond the door a parlor-match flashed up, showing the features of the man who had given the signal knock.

A cry of amazement broke from the lips of the chief, and he quickly unbarred the door. Into the cellar sprang a man, who cried:

"I would have been here on time, but Dan Downing nipped me and turned me over. I managed to break away, and made straight for here."

"Great thunder!" shouted the leader of the Tigers. "There are thirteen of us now!"

"Then one does not belong to the band!" declared the late comer.

"You are right!" burst from the lips of the head Tiger. "There is a spy among us!"

"A spy! a spy!" echoed the others.

A revolver appeared in the hand of the chief. "Unmask!" he thundered. "The man who hesitates I will shoot in his tracks!"

Off came twelve imitation tigers' heads.

The last man snatched off his disguise and flung it fairly into the face of the leader of the band, uttering a ringing shout of defiance.

The man was Double-voice Dan!

CHAPTER XIII.

A DASTARDLY DEVICE.

THE daring of the Double-voice Detective was simply astounding. In some mysterious way, he had obtained information concerning the Tigers' place of meeting and code of signals, and he had not hesitated to venture there, having entrapped one of the band and left him safely guarded, as he supposed.

Had his plan worked as it should, he would have escaped without detection and been in possession of the plans of the Tigers. With so much knowledge, he could have easily frustrated all their evil designs and brought them to justice without delay.

But now his scheme was suddenly frustrated and he was placed in a position of deadly peril.

Dan's unexpected movement in flinging his disguise into the face of the chief so disconcerted the man with the revolver that the detective escaped being shot down on the instant.

The Tiger nearest the detective happened to be a small man, and before the little fellow could make a move, he felt himself snatched from his feet.

Grasping the lightweight crook by the ankles, Dan swung the rascal around his head and charged on the others like a thunderbolt.

Down went two of the Tigers, knocked from their feet by the strange weapon in the grasp of the dauntless ferret.

Scries of terror broke from the lips of the small man who was being used in such an unceremonious manner by Dan Downing, and pandemonium reigned within the Tigers' lair.

"Shoot him! Down him!" screamed the chief, snatching the cowl from his face and trying to get at the fighting bloodhound. "He can't escape us now!"

It did seem that Double-voice Dan was in a trap from which there could be no escape.

Suddenly, still grasping the small man's ankles, Downing let the unlucky fellow hang head downward on his back, darting toward the open door of the secret passage. The dazed and dizzy Tiger served as a shield for the detective, preventing the other crooks from taking snap-shots at the disappearing ferret.

Into the tunnel plunged the detective, dropping his burden the moment the darkness concealed him.

He knew he would be hotly pursued, and he well understood he was not yet out of the trap.

What lay at the other end of the underground passage? Was there another secret door, which only those who knew the means could open?

If so, there was no possibility of escape.

Still he ran on, hearing the excited cries of the Tigers behind him. All he could do was take his chances on there being another door which he could not open.

Once before, that very night, had he made an almost marvelous escape from the Tigers and their hired assassins, and he trusted fortune to pull him out again.

He noticed the cries of the Tigers grew fainter and fainter, finally ceasing altogether.

Dan knew not what kind of a trap he might be hurrying into, but he was forced to take his chances on that. He ran one hand along the damp and dirty wall, thus literally feeling his way, even though in swift flight.

Suddenly there came a shock and he was thrown violently to the ground. For some moments he was dazed, but he finally struggled to his feet and lighted a match. The light showed him he had reached the end of the passage, and there before him was another heavy door.

This door was bolted on the side next to him, and he lost no time in throwing back the rusty irons. One of them moved with the utmost reluctance, but he succeeded in casting it from its socket.

Then he grasped an iron handle and pulled on the door.

It did not stir!

Bracing his foot against the wall, Dan gave a savage surge, and the heavy door swung open.

The smell of beer and liquors instantly assailed his nostrils.

He did not venture further in the darkness, but lighted another match. The light showed him he was, as he suspected, about to enter a cellar where liquors were stored.

"This must be beneath a saloon," he muttered, as he stepped into the cellar, closing the door behind him.

The match went out and he struck another.

Then he turned to look for the door to the passage, from which he had just entered the cellar.

He could see no sign of it, so cunningly was it concealed.

"I have no time to make investigations," said Dan, softly. "I must get out of here at once."

He found the stairs and crept swiftly upward. Fortune favored him, for the door at the top was not locked. Not a sound came from beyond it.

Dan knew morning could not be far away, and he felt every moment to be precious, even though the Tigers had not followed him far along the underground passage.

Opening the door and striking another match, he found himself in the back room of a saloon.

How was he to get out upon the street?

The back door was close at hand, and, to his intense satisfaction, the key was in the lock and he was able to shoot back the bolts.

A moment later, he was in the street.

Dan lost no time. The nearest policeman was requested to watch the saloon, the detective showing his authority. As Dan had once been on the force and was known to every bluecoat in the city, he was readily obeyed.

Then other officers were quickly stationed to watch the regular entrance to the Tigers' retreat, while a call for more men went to Headquarters.

The gray light of morning was breaking over the city when Dan Downing led a squad of armed men down into the cellar where the Tenderloin Tigers had held their secret meetings. Something told him he would not find his game, so he was not surprised to discover the cellar deserted.

A rigid and thorough search failed to reveal any trace of the vanished crooks, save one of the tiger-head cowls they had used as a disguise. That was sufficient to show the police how close they had come to scooping the troublesome crooks, and some of the officers expressed their feelings in language more forcible than elegant.

The band had left no clues behind them, but Dan Downing knew more than one of them, for they had unmasked before him. He also knew the combine was made up of no common material, the rougher and more brutal rascals not being admitted to the Thirteen, as a rule. The gang was all the more dangerous for being composed of men who had brains, for all of their crooked propensities. The more brutal rascals were used simply as hired tools.

The sun was well up and the city astir when Detective Dan made his way to his office. His head was teeming with new schemes and plots, for he now understood he had undertaken no ordinary task in breaking up the Tigers. It was to be a fight to the bitter end, and the dreaded combine knew who their worst enemy was.

Unlocking the door of his office, Dan entered. The muffled report of a pistol followed the opening of the door, and the Go-It-Alone Detective reeled back, clasping one hand to his breast.

"I'm shot!" he gasped.

There was a puff of smoke within the office, which seemed to tell him the would-be assassin lurked there.

Grinding his white teeth together, Dan leaped forward, ready to grapple with his enemy.

Then a cry of astonishment broke from his lips.

There was no living being besides himself in the office!

Arranged on a chair directly opposite the door he discovered a strange contrivance—an infernal machine, indeed!

Set in a block of wood and pointed directly toward the door was a small pistol from which weapon the shot had come. On the floor was an electric battery, and two wires ran across the floor, making the connection necessary for operation when the door swung open. The whole devilish arrangement had been so cunningly devised that the opening of the door would set the electric current in motion and discharge the pistol. The weapon had been pointed at the spot where a man's breast would naturally be were he entering the door.

It was certainly an ingenious and fiendish device, showing the Double-voice Detective how skillful and determined were his foes.

"I wonder what saved me?" muttered Dan.

He drew forth his watch, and the question was answered.

The beautiful and costly chronometer was ruined, for the bullet from the pistol was imbedded in the very center of the timepiece!

CHAPTER XIV.

HAS SHE A DOUBLE.

FOR two days Harold St. Clair was not himself. Whenever he thought of Irma Webster's treachery he felt like raving, and when he thought of Broadway Bob's triumphant leering smile he felt like committing murder.

A thousand times he reviewed every feature of the singular affair. He remembered how he had apparently won Irma's entire confidence and love and she had promised to be true.

"I shall not change."

Those were her parting words, and the very next time he saw her, she had cut him in a most maddening manner. He had always believed her utterly artless and innocent, but now he was inclined to doubt.

Sometimes he would feel that he must see her and demand an explanation, and then it would seem that he could never look on her sweet, beautiful, treacherous face again.

"I fear I should curse her!" he hoarsely muttered.

After a time, he gradually cooled and came to his sober senses.

"Am I going to leave her to the tender mercy of such a rascal as Robert Booth?" he asked himself. "Isn't it my duty to save her if I can? It would be a sweet revenge to show him as he is in his true light and then leave her without a word, no matter what appeal she made."

"I cannot understand Calvin Webster's harboring Booth. Irma once told me her father did not seem to like Bob at all, and yet—and yet—There is something back of all this—something I do not understand. I believe I will attempt to solve the mystery."

Then he took to watching the broker's handsome residence on Madison avenue. He saw Broadway Bob enter and depart. The Rounder seemed confident of his reception, and his manner caused the watcher to grind his teeth fiercely.

"I believe you are a rascal through and through!" muttered Harold. "If not, how do you live? You have no visible means of support, yet you are always expensively dressed and seem to have plenty of money. I mean to probe your career."

He saw another man enter the house.

"I believe that is Dan Downing, the detective who saved me from the Rounder's pals at Muddock's. What business can bring him there?"

When Dan came out Harold accosted him.

"Aren't you Dan Downing?"

"I am. Hello, young man. How are you coming on with Broadway Bob?"

"I was about to ask you that question. I believe I engaged you to shadow the fellow a bit, but I had forgotten it. If I had not seen you coming out of Webster's I might not have remembered it at all."

"I am coming on well, St. Clair—well enough. But we must not talk on the street here."

"Why not?"

"I will tell you, but you must not start and look around. Keep perfectly cool. We are watched."

"Watched? By whom?"

"One of Bob Booth's spies. It is nothing new for me. I have from one to four of them dogging my steps the greater portion of the time. Occasionally, when I wish to do some important work, I don a disguise and give them the slip."

"Where is the man who is watching us?"

"Stop here a moment. We will talk carefully, while you watch the opposite sidewalk near that lamp-post. In a few moments you will see a man in a gray suit saunter along, swinging a cane and smoking a cigar. That is the spy."

In a short time Harold saw the detective's shadow saunter carelessly past.

"I should think you would get tired of such surveillance, Downing."

"Oh, I don't mind it," smiled Dan. "It amuses them and it doesn't harm me. As for Broadway Bob, he will not trouble you long, I promise you that."

Harold's face lighted.

"You have discovered something of importance concerning him?"

"I could pull him now, if I wished; but there are others I intend to net. In the mean time he hopes to do me up—down me for keeps."

"For heaven's sake don't let him succeed!"

"I don't intend to."

"I believe the rascal has some kind of a pull with Calvin Webster, for he goes there."

"You may be right. Webster does not seem like himself. He has a strange, dazed air a great deal of the time, and he does not seem to know just what he wants to say. I believe the man is not well."

"But I cannot waste any more time. I will see you again before long. Good-day."

They parted, Dan hurrying down the avenue. Before Harold turned into Thirty-second street, he paused to look back. The gray-clothed man had quickened his step and was sauntering along in the same direction Downing was taking.

Harold was soon on Broadway.

Almost in front of the Fifth Avenue Hotel he came face to face with Irma!

Harold started and turned pale, expecting she would pass on without recognizing him. What was his amazement when she came directly toward him, a light of pleasure in her eyes.

"Oh, Harold!" she exclaimed. "I am so glad I met you! I have been looking for you." "Looking for me?" he managed to mutter, feeling a trifle dazed.

"Yes. I did not expect you to come to the house after—after—"

"I should think not!" came bitterly from his lips, as he thought of the meeting in the Park.

"But you know I am ever the same, Harold." He felt more dazed than ever.

"Do I?" he said, doubtfully.

She frowned and pouted prettily.

"What is the matter with you?" Irma asked. "You do not seem at all like yourself."

"I have good reasons for seeming different."

"Still, you trust me, Harold—I am sure you do!"

What could he say?

"I must have a talk with you," declared Harold. "This is no place. Come into the hotel."

In a corner of the parlor of the hotel they sat down close together.

"Why didn't you recognize me in the Park Tuesday?" he asked.

"Tuesday?"

"Yes."

"In the Park?"

"Yes."

"I was not there!"

Harold was astounded.

"It must be you have forgotten, Irma!" he cried. "I saw you there."

She shook her head.

"I did not leave the house Tuesday."

"Do you really mean it?"

She looked at him reproachfully.

"Of course I mean it! Do you think I would tell you a falsehood?"

"No, no!" he quickly exclaimed. "And yet—"

"What is it? I see something strange has happened. Tell me everything."

Her gloved hand was on his arm, her melting eyes looking pleadingly into his face.

"I was ready five minutes ago to take my oath I saw you in the Park Tuesday."

"Then you must see how easy it is to be deceived. I was not there."

He passed a hand across his forehead, as if to brush away the dazed feeling.

"It is strange—unaccountable. Have you a double?"

"It must be. Who was this person who looks like me with?"

"Robert Booth."

She started back.

"And you could think it possible I would be seen in Central Park with him! Why, I detest the very ground the man walks on! I have grown to hate him most sincerely. Harold, you do not trust me!"

"Yes, yes—I do! But the lady with him was your perfect counterpart. I bowed, but she did not recognize me. You can understand my feelings."

"You thought I gave you the cut?"

"I could not help thinking so."

"Now, I am really angry at you! Had I not given you my word to remain true? And you could believe me so heartless!"

"Forgive me, Irma! I am only too overjoyed to know it was all a wretched mistake! I will never doubt you again—never!"

She sunk back into the chair, smiling.

"I suppose I shall have to overlook it this time, but do not dare doubt me again! No matter what happens, Robert Booth can never be anything to me. It is true father has changed and seems to like him, but that makes no difference. My father will not be cruel enough to force me into an alliance against which my heart rebels. In the end I believe it will all come out right."

"I trust so, but I must warn you to be on your guard. Something tells me Booth is about to make a desperate play."

Almost at the door of the hotel they came face to face with Broadway Bob. The Rounder started, fixed his dark eyes on Irma's and lifted his hat.

She bowed mechanically.

CHAPTER XV.

A CRISIS.

"WHY did you recognize him, Irma?" asked Harold, jealousy surging in his breast once more.

"I don't know," she replied.

There was something in the manner that Harold did not like but he had promised to trust her.

"Perhaps it were better," he confessed.

"It was certainly more lady-like. While he calls at the house, I suppose I must recognize him."

When they parted, Harold lost no time in

seeing Dan Downing. He was fortunate in finding the detective.

Seated in Downing's office, the young man told him of the affair from beginning to end.

"Now, what do you think of it?" he concluded.

"It appears that Irma Webster must have a double."

"Just what I thought," nodded Harold. "I believe there is a big conspiracy afoot."

"Of what nature?"

"I am not prepared to say for certain, but is it not possible Bob Booth means to substitute this strange double for Irma?"

"I have heard of such things," confessed Dan. "But, if that is his purpose, he was foolish to appear in public with Irma Webster's double."

Still, it will be well to watch out for any such an attempt."

Dan was not inclined to communicate his plans, but he promised Harold to let him know if he saw anything that indicated Broadway Bob contemplated the desperate move of which they had spoken. Before the young man departed Dan promised to discover if Irma had left the house at all Tuesday. For all his assertion that he trusted her, there was still a vague doubt in Harold's mind.

That very night he received a note from Downing, which read as follows:

"MY DEAR ST. CLAIR—"

"I have made inquiries concerning the point spoken of, and I find Miss Webster *did* leave the house Tuesday afternoon. More than that, I learned she went out to drive with Robert Booth, whose turnout stood fifteen minutes before Calvin Webster's door! Hastily.

DOWNING."

Harold read the note over several times, a dull pain in his heart. At first, he could not believe it was true, but the conviction that Irma had deliberately deceived him slowly forced itself upon him.

"Still, I do not understand it," he muttered, hoarsely. "Why should she wish to deceive me in such a manner—why should she deliberately tell me a falsehood?"

"Well, I will go away and never see her again. There is no reason why I should remain here now. She needs no protection from the man she deliberately chooses as her companion."

For all of this decision, he could not bring himself to believe everything was as black as it appeared on the surface.

"Is it not possible I met and talked with her double in the Fifth Avenue Hotel? No, no, no! Such a thing is utterly out of the question. That was Irma! My only hope is that Downing is mistaken."

He was tortured mentally in a most distracting manner; but the very next day the final blow came. He met a friend, who said:

"Are you in the secret, Harold, old man?"

"What secret?" asked Harold.

"Why, about the sudden marriage of your Madison Avenue friend. It is to be a very quiet affair, but, of course you know all about it."

Harold's heart stopped beating for a time.

"Possibly I have not been informed," he said, speaking as calmly as he could. "Give me the points. Who are the parties?"

"Bob Booth is the lucky man."

St. Clair's hand fell with a grip of steel on the arm of the other.

"Who is the bride?"

"Why, Irma Webster. I thought you were favored there at one time. Good God! What is the matter with you?"

He sprang to support Harold, who was swaying blindly, and whose face was like that of a corpse. But his assistance was not needed.

"When did this marriage take place?" asked Harold, suddenly straightening up, his eyes blazing.

"When did it take place?"

"Yes, yes! Speak, man! Speak, before I tear the words from your lips!"

"Why, it hasn't taken place yet."

"Not yet?"

"No."

"Then, when is it to occur?"

"This evening."

"You are sure this is true, Peyster?"

"Certainly. It is not openly reported, but still it has got about. It is to be a sort of private affair. The bride and groom will sail tomorrow for Europe."

"Peyster," said Harold, slowly, his voice sounding harsh and shaky, "there will be no wedding!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. Read the papers tomorrow morning!"

With that, he turned and dashed away, leaving Peyster open-mouthed and astounded.

Harold sought for Double-voice Dan.

"The detective will know just what to do," he thought. "Bob Booth must be arrested on some charge. That is the only way to prevent this marriage. It must be delayed until Downing gets all the evidence he needs against the Rounder."

Double-voice Dan was not easy to find just then, but Harold did not give over the search until he had placed his hand on the detective's arm.

The lights were beginning to twinkle from the windows and street lamps.

"I know all about it," declared Double-voice Dan, before Harold could speak a word. "Leave everything to me."

"You will prevent this horrible affair from taking place Downing?"

"Yes."

"Will you arrest Booth?"

"No. I have another plan."

"What is it?"

"Never mind. I have given you my word to spoil the game; that is enough. I will see you again."

The detective disappeared into the throng.

Harold was in anything but an enviable frame of mind, but he trusted everything to Dan Downing. There was really no other course for him to pursue.

However, eight o'clock in the evening found him on Madison Avenue in the vicinity of Calvin Webster's house. The mansion was brilliantly lighted, but Harold could not see many people astir about the place.

Later, a carriage drew up at the door and two gentlemen left it for the house. The watcher made out that neither of them was Broadway Bob.

Within thirty minutes a closed cab rolled up and stopped in front of Webster's. Two more men left the cab, and within ten minutes, several carriages had dropped people at the door.

Harold's nerves were atremble, for he knew the critical moment was at hand.

Would Downing keep his promise and baffle Bob Booth's plot?

Among the carriages remaining in front of the door was one to which a handsome and mettlesome pair of grays were attached. The horses were fiery and impatient, and the driver was forced to talk to them a great deal in order to keep them quiet.

Harold paid no heed to anything outside the house now, for he felt that the ceremony was on the point of taking place. He came down the sidewalk and paused under the parlor window, which was open, although the shades were closely drawn. As he halted there, he heard some words which brought his heart into his throat.

"If any person know just cause why this man should not take this woman to be his lawfully wedded wife, let him speak now, or forever after hold his peace!"

Then there was a sudden commotion within the room. The man outside heard cries of astonishment and anger, a woman's shriek, and and then the shade at the window was torn down.

The lights within the parlor revealed a strange scene.

The man who had torn down the window shade held the form of a beautiful girl, dressed in white, upon his arm, while he turned back and menaced the others within the room with a revolver. His face was covered by a bushy black beard, and he looked like a most desperate ruffian.

The girl on his arm was Irma Webster, and she seemed unconscious or in a state of stupor.

Only one instant did the man pause, then he sprang out through the window and swung himself lightly to the stone steps, down which he dashed.

Within the parlor, lying prone on the richly carpeted floor, stricken senseless by a terrible blow on the head, lay a man clothed in a full-dress suit and wearing white gloves on his hands.

The bridegroom was completely knocked out!

CHAPTER XVI.

DAN HOLDS "THE DROP."

HAROLD ST. CLAIR was astounded by the daring act of the kidnapper, but his wits worked swiftly, and he leaped forward to prevent the abduction.

The driver of the spirited turnout divined the young man's purpose, and struck at Harold's head with the butt of a heavy whip. The blow was effective, for the young man was sent staggering backward, to drop limply on the walk, a million colored lights seeming to blaze and burst before his eyes.

Into the carriage the kidnapper swung his precious burden, and when Harold staggered to his feet the mettlesome grays were dashing down the avenue.

"After them!" yelled Harold, leaping toward the nearest cab and swinging himself up beside the driver. "Fifty dollars if you overtake them—yes, a hundred dollars!"

"Do you mean it?" gasped cabby.

"My God, yes! Be lively! I'll give you twenty-five dollars whether you catch them or not! Whip up! whip up!"

He snatched the whip and rained blows on the frightened horse, which went lunging down the avenue in pursuit of the carriage ahead.

Out of Webster's rushed several people, and a third carriage was soon in pursuit of the other two.

The kidnappers had the advantage, for they

possessed the best team. From Madison avenue they struck Twenty-third street, and from Twenty-third street they turned down Broadway to Fourteenth.

Still the cab kept them in view and still Harold urged the driver on by increasing his bribes. His heart was sinking, for he saw the cab horse was no match for the grays. To his surprise the kidnappers turned to the east when they struck Fourteenth street.

The grays were a long distance ahead when they turned into Second avenue, but Harold had not given up hope. Some accident might compel them to halt.

The team disappeared from view, and Harold was amazed to find himself close upon the grays when the cab reached the avenue. In fact, the fugitives seemed to have suddenly lost their great desire to escape.

"We'll overtake them!" exclaimed Harold, exultantly.

"Little good it'll do," answered the cabman.

"What do you mean?"

"They've got rid of the gal."

It was true. The girl was no longer in the carriage, and her bushy-bearded kidnapper had also vanished!

"Tricked!" cried Harold.

"Sure as fate," retorted cabby.

"But they shall suffer for it! I'll have that driver arrested, if we can overtake him!"

That, however, they were unable to do. The driver soon whipped up again, and it was not long before pursuit was abandoned.

Already had the police been notified of the most daring abduction ever known in New York, and they were laying their snares to prevent the kidnappers from escaping out of the city. It seemed that it would be no great task to discover the driver of the grays and force the truth from his lips.

But when another morning came, no trace of the kidnapped girl or her abductors had been discovered. The morning papers contained a full account of the astonishing occurrence and commented editorially on the amazing daring of the kidnappers, moralizing to the effect that living in New York was getting to be as dangerous as living in the bandit infested regions of the Wild West.

High and low Harold St. Clair sought for Dan Downing, but the detective had disappeared and was not to be found.

Reporters rushed to interview Calvin Webster, but the broker seemed dazed, and he could give them very little satisfaction. When asked what he proposed to do, he seemed utterly at a loss to tell. He had formed no plans, but seemed waiting to hear from the police.

Broadway Bob was like a raving madman, his fury was so great. He made dire threats, but he also seemed incapable of doing anything toward unearthing the kidnappers and rescuing his intended bride.

Strangest of all, the gray horses and their driver had vanished and were not to be found by the police.

The whole affair was most singular and unaccountable, and the afternoon papers devoted columns to the story. The whole city was agog with excitement, for never before had there been a case like it.

Another night came, and still the mystery was unsolved. The police seemed to feel certain the kidnapped girl had not been carried from the city, but they were still unable to locate her.

Broadway Bob and Dandy Dave were drinking together in a Sixth avenue saloon when they were approached by a familiar figure. Bob uttered an exclamation as his eyes fell on the seedy coat and carefully pressed pants of Sleek, the Shadow Sneak.

The Grand street detective made an excited but cautious signal.

"Come here," commanded Booth.

The bogus detective approached, nodding toward Dandy Dave in a significant manner.

"Sit down," ordered the Rounder, placing a chair at the little table. "This is a particular friend of mine. You can speak right out before him."

Sleek hesitated.

"I'm in the ring," assured the Masher. "Let her slide, old hoss!"

"I believe I have found the girl," ventured the Shadow Sneak.

In a moment Bob Booth's hand fell on Sleek's wrist with a grip of iron, and the Rounder demanded:

"What girl?"

"The one who was kidnapped last night."

"The deuce you think so! What makes you believe anything of the sort?"

"I saw her face at a window!"

"Where?"

"Over on the East Side."

"How did you happen to be there?"

"I followed Dan Downing to the place."

"That settles it! You must take us there without a moment's delay. Is Downing there now?"

"No; he was in Trainor's at Thirty-third street not fifteen minutes ago."

"Then no time is to be lost! Lead on! Dave and I are with you!"

When they were outside, the nearest cab was

hailed and the driver was given instructions by Sleek, after which all three piled in and were whirled rumbling over the uneven streets of the worst paved city in America.

The cab took them directly to a disreputable locality on the East Side. Bob settled with the driver, and then, with Dandy Dave, followed Sleek down a dark alley.

"Are you prepared to fight, Dave?" asked the Rounder.

"If I have to," was the Masher's reply.

Dave did not have a great reputation as a fighter, but he was known to be reliable and nervy.

Down in the darkness of the alley the bogus detective paused at a little door.

"This is the way to get in," he said.

"Go on," commanded Bob.

The three silently entered the building. The Grand street sharp seemed to know the way pretty well, for he only hesitated once or twice. He whispered an explanation that he had entered the building and attempted to get away with the girl, but had not been able to do so.

Up some uncertain stairs they crept.

"What is the matter with this place?" questioned Bob. "It seems deserted."

"It should be," cautiously replied Sleek. "It has been condemned as unsafe and the tenants forced to evacuate. It is to be torn down in a few days."

At the head of the second flight, the Grand street sharp whispered.

"The room where the girl was to-day is right ahead. You had better remain here a moment and let me investigate. If the coast is clear, I will hiss. Then you are to come on."

Like a creeping cat, he sneaked along the passage. Once a board creaked a bit under his feet, but he had well-earned the title of the "Shadow Sneak."

They heard him open a door that squeaked a little on its hinges, and then—

"Help! help!"

Following the cry, came the sound of fierce struggle and the slamming of a door.

The cry for help had been in Bob Sleek's voice!

"Come, Dave!" shouted the Rounder, springing forward without hesitation. "Sleek is in trouble!"

Dandy followed, although his nerves were badly shaken.

Flinging open a door beyond which the Shadow Sneak had passed, the two men leaped into the room beyond.

Of a sudden, a bright light flared up, and they saw a man sitting astride a chair, on the back of which his hands rested.

And each hand clasped the butt of a self-cocking revolver!

"I hold the drop, gentlemen," calmly declared Double-voice Dan, a placid smile on his rugged face.

CHAPTER XVII.

LEFT TO DIE.

"DAN DOWNING!"

"The devil!"

In all New York it would have been impossible to find two more astonished men than Broadway Bob and Dandy Dave.

They could scarcely believe the evidence of their eyes.

"I assure you I am not the devil," smiled the Go-It-Alone Detective.

"Then you are in league with him!" retorted the Rounder.

"I have no dealings with your master," returned Dan, readily.

"Help! help!" shouted the muffled voice of Sleek, the Shadow Sneak, seeming to come from another room. "Don't let 'em murder me."

"Your friend is calling you," smiled Double-voice Dan.

"The cur led us into this trap!" hissed Booth.

"That is no fault of his," assured Dan Downing. "I knew he was shadowing me, and I played my cards accordingly. He was badly fooled."

"I believe he is in with you."

"That is something of a joke. I am not entering into partnership with any of your tools, Broadway Bob. I assure you of that."

The sound of a struggle came from the adjoining room, and Sleek's voice was heard alternately raving and begging.

"He seems restless," observed the Double-voice Detective. "However, I fancy my friend will take care of him very well."

"I hope your friend will fix him so he will never lead me into another snap of this sort!" snarled the Rounder. "What do you propose to do?"

"I am thinking of forcing you to produce Irma Webster's double."

"Her double?"

"That's what I said."

"I know of no double."

"You may or may not be speaking the truth. I know you prefer to lie any time."

"You infernal—"

"Now, go slow, my boy! Remember your position. I hold trump cards, and I may take a notion to play my hand for all it is worth. I would be doing the country a service if I took a

notion to see what kind of a looking corpse you would make. You have tried your best to lay me out; and turn about is fair play, you know."

"This is all talk! What do you propose to do?"

"Don't get impatient, Robbie. There is lots of time; in fact, we have the whole night before us. See how easy I take things, and profit by my example."

The Rounder raved, while Dandy Dave muttered some savage words beneath his breath.

Dan Downing seemed to enjoy the scene immensely.

"I would ask you to have some chairs, but this ranch does not seem to be overstocked with furniture," he said. "You will have to lean up against the wall and let it go at that. I really did not expect you would bring a friend with you, Robert."

"Where is Irma Webster?" the Rounder suddenly asked.

"How should I know?"

"I believe you had a hand in that job last night."

"What you believe doesn't count, Robert."

"You do not deny it!"

"I won't take the trouble, dear sir."

"I dare you to deny it!"

"I am too old a bird to be worked by that trick."

"By Heaven! if you did that job, you have made yourself an outlaw! I can have you arrested and punished!"

"You must remember it is always necessary to have a little proof before you can secure conviction."

"That I have."

"Do you really think so?"

"I know it! Bob Sleek saw the girl in this house, and now I have found you here."

"Did Sleek say he saw the girl here?"

"Yes."

"Then Sleek lied, for he never saw Irma Webster in his life. Besides that, do you imagine for a moment his word would be believed. Why, he is notorious for his crookedness! You have him in your employ, but I warn you to look sharp after him, else he will sell you out."

"It won't be well for him if he does!"

"Dropping this, I'll tell you just what I want of you now. That is what you are so impatient to know."

"Yes."

"All right. I want you to—"

"Hark!" exclaimed Dandy Dave, interrupting the detective. "A fire engine has stopped on this block! Hear the crowd yelling! There is a fire near! I smell smoke!"

"Imagination!" asserted Dan. "If you keep in Bob Booth's company, you are liable to smell brimstone."

"I am not mistaken!" affirmed Dave. "There comes a second engine! Listen! My Moses! this building is afire!"

He was right. A sudden puff of smoke came up from below and they heard the soft creeping crackle of flames!

The old building had received the attention of a prowling fire-bug!

A crash down below told the firemen were at work.

"I am sorry to be interrupted in such a manner, gentlemen," said Dan Downing; "but it seems that we shall have to postpone this interview until a later date. You will oblige me by turning square around and walking out through the door by which you entered."

They obeyed. The threatening pistol told them it was the best thing to do.

Dan slammed and bolted the door behind them.

Then they realized their situation.

"Holy Heaven!" gasped Dandy Dave. "We are trapped! There fire cuts us off from the stairs!"

As if to corroborate his declaration, a sudden burst of flame came up from below, illuming the interior of the old rookery.

The two men looked into each other's eyes, their faces blanched.

"The door!" Bob suddenly cried. "Down it goes!"

He whirled and flung himself against the door Dan Downing had bolted. Once—twice—the third time it gave way and they rushed back into the room.

The light of the fire now showed them their way and they hurried into the next room.

Bob stumbled over something, and then the voice of Sleek, the Shadow Sneak, cried:

"Help! Set me free! See, I am bound, hands and feet! I'll be roasted by the fire if you don't free me!"

"Then roast!" was Broadway Bob's brutal retort. "You got us into this trap, and we'll let you get out—if you can!"

They hurried on, regardless of the pitiful appeals of the bogus detective.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THERE'S MANY A SLIP," ETC.

"HELP!" shrieked the voice of Bob Sleek. "Don't leave me here to die—please don't leave me here! Save me! save me!"

Dandy Dave whirled, but Broadway Bob caught his arm.

"Where are you going?" the Rounder demanded.

"Back to set that poor devil free and give him a chance for his life."

"You won't do anything of the kind!"

"It is inhuman to leave him to be burned alive!"

"It is the easiest way we can get rid of him. He is proving of no earthly use save to lead us into snares, and he knows too much concerning me. He could swear us both into lock if he took a notion, and he is just the kind of a man who is likely to take a notion. Come on!"

The Masher was controlled by the master mind, and reluctantly followed.

Was Sleek destined to perish in the burning building?

"I wonder where Dan Downing is," came from Broadway Bob's lips. "If I could see him— Ha! who are those?"

He caught a glimpse of two figures disappearing into a room, the door of which was violently closed.

"Great blizzards!" shouted the Rounder. "I believe that was Downing and the girl!"

They dashed forward and tried the door.

It was immovable.

"Give me room!" commanded Bob, as he backed away.

The next moment he made a rush at the door, and it fell with a crash before his assault.

Dandy Dave followed his leader, but they found the room empty, and there was no other door leading from it.

"The window!" cried the Masher. "They must have gone that way!"

Through the window came the light of the rising flames and the sounds of the fire-engines. They also heard the crowd shouting something.

Rushing to the window, they looked down. A wretched fire-escape was close at hand, but there was no one on it below. Still, they saw the upturned faces of the gathering crowd, as if the people were watching something above.

Broadway Bob looked upward, and he was just in time to see the legs of a man who was leaving the fire-escape for the roof.

"They have gone upward!" he exclaimed, as he scrambled through the window onto the fire-escape. "Come on, Dave! We'll follow 'em close!"

Up the iron ladder he went, Dandy Dave not far behind. When the roof was reached, they were just in time to see the head of a man who was vanishing into another part of the building by the skylight.

The pursuers lost no time in following. They found the skylight open, but when Bob reached downward with his feet and felt for the steps or the ladder, he found none.

"We've got to drop for it!" he gritted.

"They've taken the ladder away."

He swung down by his hands and dropped into the darkness below. Then Dandy Dave heard him call up:

"All right. Be lively, pal!"

The Masher followed.

"Here are some stairs," said Bob. "Come on! They must have gone down!"

Down the stairs they plunged, losing no time until the ground floor was reached. There they found an outer door standing wide open, but they saw not a trace of the ones they were following.

"Skipped up!" snarled Bob. "They have got away!"

Some of the assembled spectators were near at hand, and the Rounder eagerly asked if any of them had seen some one come out of that door.

"I did, mister," declared a street gamin.

"How many?"

"Quarter of a dollar, boss."

"What?"

"Quarter of a dollar, boss."

With a muttered expression of anger, the Rounder snatched a dollar from his pocket and placed it in the hands of the shrewd gamin.

"There was two of them," the boy instantly replied.

"Was one a woman?"

"Yep, she was a female. She had a veil over her face, so I didn't see if she was a good looker."

"Which way did they go?"

"Foller me; I'll show yer."

The boy quickly led them through a narrow passage and they found themselves on the main street.

"They kem through dere," the gamin asserted; "but I don't know where dey went afterwards."

The Rounder made many inquiries, but not one of the slatternly women or bleary-eyed men of the neighborhood had noticed the strange man and woman.

"I believe that boy lied!" Bob finally exclaimed. "Where is he?"

The crafty young rascal had vanished.

Disgusted beyond measure, the two baffled rascals turned back. They were amazed to come face to face with Sleek, the Shadow Sneak.

"We were just going back to pull you out of

that," the Rounder quickly declared. "How did you escape?"

"I managed to get my hands free," was the answer. "But I am done with you! A man who will leave any one to roast in that way is too mean for me!"

"Didn't I tell you I was on the point of going back to pull you out? Don't make a fool of yourself, Sleek! I was so hot after Dan Downing just then that I did not know what I was doing. Do you think that I would really have left you there? Of course you don't!"

"It looked that way."

"Take my word for it, I would have been back there within two minutes. I was so excited then that I did not think of the peril you were in. Don't you believe me?"

Sleek hesitated.

"You may be telling the truth," he acknowledged; "but—"

"It's all right, man," and Bob patted the bogus detective soothingly on the back. "I have plenty of work for you, and I'll raise your pay, if you do well."

"Then I'll try to forget this night. It's money I need, and I am with you, if you shell out properly."

The three men went away together, paying no further attention to the burning building.

That night the police were notified Dan Downing knew where Irma Webster was. Robert Booth made the accusation, and he further stated he believed the Go-It-Alone Detective had been at the bottom of the kidnapping. He was astonished and angered when he saw the officers put little credit in his words.

In the mean time, an oldish-appearing woman, who was closely veiled, and a rather handsome young fellow, who seemed like her son, seemed waiting for the appearance of some one at the Desbrosses Street Ferry. The young man seemed nervous and impatient, but the woman sat quietly in one of the long seats that runs around the waiting-room.

The two attracted some attention because they allowed several boats to leave while they still lingered, the young man walked up and down, now and then pausing to speak to the woman, who replied in an indistinct murmur, or by nods and shakes of her head. Not once did she lift her veil.

New Yorkers are naturally suspicious of any one who appears a trifle odd, and it was but natural the strange couple should be favored with many searching glances.

At length, an old gray-bearded man came in and hastened to greet the woman. He was dressed and appeared like a countryman.

"Why, howdy-do, Sarah!" he cried, grabbing both her hands and shaking them exuberantly. "I'm nigh tickled to death to see ye! An' this is my little nevy, Jack? Why, what a strappin' great boy he's grown to be—he's a man now! Looks a little soft an' cityfied, but I s'pose livin' 'round these parts makes one that way."

The woman still kept her veil down, replying in a low tone, but the young man came forward and shook the old country man's hand, saying:

"I am glad to see you, Uncle Jim."

"Now, be ye really?" chuckled the old fellow.

"Hain't a bit 'shamed o' me, I s'pose?"

"Not at all, uncle," asserted the young man, but he looked around as if anxious to avoid notice.

"Why didn't you come right to our house in Jersey City as soon as you got here?" "Didn't know you'd care to be bothered with an old coon like me. I'd made up my mind to see New Yoke 'fore I died, an' so I jest kem down, makin' up my mind to go it alone, an' show the folks I wasn't sech a 'tarnal green-horn as they thought I was."

"Come!" exclaimed the young man, as the gateman's whistle sounded. "We'll have to hurry, or we'll lose this boat."

"I kin hurry," assured the old fellow. "I'm jest about as spry as I uster be when I could throw your dad flam onter his back at every flop."

They hastened through the sliding door, being just in time, as it closed in the face of a man who happened to be behind them. The old fellow was talking all the while.

"Ben was pritty good at backs," he said, "but I was more'n his match, fer all that. My great snap was side-holts. Oh, I was a ripper at side-holts! Never yit got holt o' the fellow as could flip me that way."

The rattling of chains told that the boat was on the point of leaving the slip.

"Get a move on there!" shouted a uniformed man.

But suddenly two officers, who had apparently been waiting for some one, stopped the trio.

"I beg your pardon, lady," said one, with a polite bow. "I trust you will not be offended, but I wish to see your face."

The woman started back angrily, while the old countryman pushed forward and looked the officer over.

"Wal, by gosh!" exclaimed the old man. "You hev got about the biggest gall of any feller I ever saw!"

"Button up your lip, old man," advised the second officer. "You will get yourself into trouble."

This caused the countryman to fairly dance with anger.

"By gum! this is more than I kin stand!" he shouted, spitting on his hands and rubbing them together. "I don't 'low nobody to talk to me in that way, even if he does wear brass buttons all over him! I hain't hed a good old scrimmage for a long time, but I'll bet I hain't fergot how."

Having expressed himself thus, he suddenly let go at the officer, who was taken by surprise and knocked down in an instant. Then he whirled on the other, and a terrific left-hander upset number two.

"Skedaddle fer the boat!" shouted the victor, catching the old woman up in his arms and starting on a run down the incline carrying her as easily as if she did not weigh a pound.

The young fellow was at his side.

Already was the ferry-boat swinging clear of the bridge, and there was a wide gap.

The old man did not hesitate to make the leap, no one happening to be at hand to stop him, and he landed safely on the boat. The young fellow also jumped and was successful.

Standing outside the iron gate of the boat, the old countryman turned and gayly waved his hand at the two officers, who had picked themselves up and dashed down the bridge, only to find the strange trio beyond their reach.

CHAPTER XIX.

TOM DUKE'S BOLD STROKE.

"GOOD BY, Bobbies!" cheerfully called the old countryman, as the ferry-boat left the slip where the two baffled officers were fairly dancing with fury. "Don't you never try ter fool round Old Sol Plunkett ag'in. I may be a little green, but I hain't no 'tarnal fool, by gosh!"

The boat hands had been astonished by the old man's wonderful leap, but now two of them rushed up, one opening the iron gate while the other expostulated with the countryman.

"Don't you know better than to do a thing like that?" exclaimed the angry deck-hand.

"It's a wonder you ain't in the drink, along with that lady. Come, git inside here!"

"Now, don't you git funny, my friend," advised the man from the country, as soon as he was inside the gate. "If you've got enny advice ter give me, jest do it in a kinder decent way, or me an' you'll hev trouble."

But few of the passengers had witnessed the rather exciting leap of the countryman, but one who had seen it turned to another, saying guardedly:

"If these people aren't three crooks, I'm mistaken! They slipped those officers neatly enough."

"Dat's dead right," agreed the one spoken to, nodding his head knowingly. "Dat old cove is a scrapper from der word go. Why, der way he swiped dem fly cops made me t'ink o' der blisters wot Corbett spotted on Sully's nose. If der old boy warn't quite ser aged, he might make a good man fer der ring."

The first speaker drew away somewhat, as if the language of number two had not particularly pleased him, but he said:

"Don't you imagine for a moment that countryman is as old as he seems. He has a pretty good make-up on, and that is the secret of the whole business."

"You t'ink he's wearin' a rig?"

"I am pretty sure of it."

"Well, I guesses ye'r right. All der same, it hain't none of my cheeze, an' I don't put me nose in. See?"

The man with the tough dialect waved his hand and the other seemed to decide he was not in congenial company, for he slowly edged away.

The last speaker was Tom Duke, the Slugger, whom the reader last saw in Murdock's, on Sixth avenue. His curiosity had been aroused, although he pretended carelessness, and he resolved to keep his eyes on the countryman.

The old lady and the young man hurried into the women's passenger room while the old fellow stood wrangling with the deck-hand. Duke allowed them to go on, thinking he would have no trouble in finding them later.

The excitement of the old man seemed to daze him somewhat, for he made for the dark portion of the boat which is reserved for teams, paying no attention to the call of the man with whom he had been talking.

Tom Duke followed.

"Youse don't give me der slip, old gent," muttered the Slugger. "I'm goin' ter see w'at you go."

The countryman dodged in and out amid the teams and Duke had difficulty in keeping track of him. Had there been a large number of teams, it is possible the pugilist would have been given the slip without trouble. As it was, the man from the country vanished, and then, as Duke was hastening forward, a dark figure uprose before him.

The next instant Tom Duke received a terrific blow between the eyes. As he fell, his head struck against the hub of a wagon-wheel, and he was stunned for some moments.

When he recovered, the Slugger sought for the old man in vain.

The Jersey shore was not reached before a police tug darted past the ferry-boat, and more

than one of the passengers felt confident the trio who had escaped from the officers on the New York side would be arrested at the landing slip.

But where were the trio? Like the old countryman, the young man and the veiled lady had apparently vanished, for Duke was unsuccessful in his search for them.

"Dey're playin' slick," the Slugger acknowledged. "Dey oughter git away, but I'd like ter swipe der feller w'ot hit me! Me head's got a big knob on der front side where he put his fist an' annoder on der back side where der wheel struck."

As had been expected, a number of policemen were waiting when the boat ran into the Jersey slip. The chains were made fast and the gates opened, and then, as the passengers came off, the officers scanned them closely.

Just as he was leaving the boat, the face of a very pretty but rather pale girl attracted the attention of Tom Duke. The girl was in the company of a middle-aged man, whose hair and mustache were tinged with gray and who walked with a slight limp.

"Where have I seen dat piece of silk before?" thought the Slugger. "I'm dead sure I hev seen her, but I don't seem— I hev it!"

The pugilist looked at her again, and then he repeated:

"I have it, swipe me if I hain't! Dat's der gal w'ot Bob Booth is havin' der fuss over. I saw him ridin' with her once. Dat's der very gal w'ot was taken right out of his fingers jest w'en he was goin' ter marry her! Holy jee! but hain't dere a bold game bein' played!"

The Slugger was not naturally a quick-witted man, but it slowly crept through his brain that the girl he now saw with the middle-aged man was the veiled "old woman" who had been brought aboard the boat in the countryman's arms. While crossing the North River, the girl had found an opportunity to remove her veil and shift her make-up and appearance so she did not look in the least like the one who boarded the boat in such a remarkable manner.

It also became plain to Duke that if it were truly Irma Webster, she was not an unwilling captive. Instead of that, she was doing all she could to aid her kidnappers. This was something he did not readily understand, but he did not spend any time in puzzling over it just then.

Who was the man with her?
"Is dat der old cove?" Tom questioned himself. "No, it hain't him. Den it must be— yes, it is der young feller!"

Another change had been made, and the two were going to boldly run the gantlet of the policeman's keen eyes. In fact, they were chatting pleasantly, seeming quite unconcerned, when they left the boat.

The officers scrutinized them no closer than the others, and they passed on without being challenged.

"Dat's a bold game!" muttered Duke, in admiration. "Dat gal's got nerve!"

He followed them, thinking what admirable crooks they would make, if they could slip the officers so easily every time they were "wanted."

"Dey'd oughter b'long ter der gang," he thought. "Never no such people was cut out to be honest!"

Neither the girl nor her companion seemed in any haste, for they walked along slowly, and any one near them might have noticed they were discussing the merit of some well-known play and the actors who took part in it. This was the most natural thing in the world, and they were not given a second look by those around them.

Together, they made their way to the spot where a cab appeared to be waiting. The man spoke to the driver, but Duke was not near enough to hear what he said.

"I believe I know dat cabby," muttered the Slugger. He hurried up, discovering he was correct in his surmise.

"Hello, Pete," he called, making a mysterious signal to the man on the cab. "How goes it?"

"Same old way," was the reply, while the driver nodded in a manner that indicated he understood the signal.

The man had helped the girl into the cab, asking no assistance of the driver, but he paused with his hand on the open door, looking back toward the slip. The electric light which shone full on his face showed a look of anxiety there.

"Is he coming?" whispered the girl.

"I don't see anything of him," was the guarded reply.

"Can anything have happened?"

"Trust Dan Downing to take care of himself."

Had Tom Duke heard these words, he would have known the old countryman was none other than the famous Go-It-Alone Detective, whose colossal nerve and limitless daring had made him the terror to evil-doers that he was.

In none of his acts was Dan Downing conventional. He never attempted to work out a case on the lines that would naturally be employed by the regular detectives, and this made him still more successful and still more feared. He always arrived at the ends he sought by some startling and unexpected turn, which an ordinary man would not have dared adopt.

The ordinary detective would have brought a charge against Broadway Bob and caused his arrest just before the wedding was to take place, preventing the ceremony in that manner.

Dan Downing did nothing of the kind. He had reasons to believe Irma Webster was in the power of the Rounder, and he did not hesitate to get her away from him by a most daring and unexpected trick. Calling on a young Jersey City detective whom he knew reliable, he actually kidnapped the girl at the very moment the minister was about to pronounce her Robert Booth's wife!

This was not done without the previous knowledge of Calvin Webster, which will be explained anon.

In attempting to destroy the Tenderloin Tigers Dan knew he had tackled the biggest job of his life, and he realized the whole band was pitted against him in his battle with Broadway Bob. If he made a few arrests he would fail in the grand coup he had planned, and he might not be able to sustain any charges, as his evidence was sadly lacking. It was true he had seen enough, but other witnesses were necessary.

Dan's detective friend had been with him in the East Side rookery, from which they were driven by the fire. The Double-voice Detective had intrusted Irma to the other's care, while he remained behind to fling Broadway Bob and Dandy Dave off the scent. The meeting at Desbrosses Street Ferry was planned in a few moments, but the interference of the officers was not looked for. However, Dan had given them the slip in his usual nifty manner.

Tom Duke understood the cab was waiting for the second man, and he suddenly resolved on a bold move. Slipping around behind it, he suddenly sprang out on the man by the door. Out shot the Slugger's big fist, and Downing's detective friend was upset in a twinkling.

"Drive like der devil, Pete!" hissed Tom, as he sprang into the cab and closed the door.

Then he turned his attention to the startled girl, who uttered a cry of fear.

"Shut up!" he grated, grasping her roughly and placing a hand over her mouth.

The cab was bouncing over the stones, and Irma Webster was in the power of a desperate and conscienceless rascal!

CHAPTER XX.

PROVING HIS POWER.

TOM DUKE had struck the Jersey City detective a fearful blow, and when the unlucky fellow was assisted to his feet by some men who hurried up, the cab had disappeared around a corner.

"Which way did that cab go?" the unfortunate man cried, his only thought being to start immediately in pursuit.

Being given the general direction, he rushed away like a madman, leaving those who had gathered around him to speculate over what had happened.

For a little time Irma Webster fought desperately with the big ruffian who had entered the cab, but she was no match for the brute, and Tom suddenly found an unconscious girl in his arms.

"That makes it all der easier!" he chuckled. "I hope she'll stay dis way till I gits her inter Tony Smike's. I'll be all right den."

At length, when they were on a dark street, he opened the door and called to the driver:

"Pete—hey, Pete!"

"What ye want, Tom?"

"Take us ter Smike's."

"O. K."

Then Tom closed the door and drew the curtains almost down. The flitting lights on either hand shot ghostly rays into the cab, now and then showing the death-like face of the unconscious girl or the grim, bulldog features of the man.

The cab-driver took care to avoid the principal streets. He knew very well where Smike's was, and before long he drew up at the door.

Once more Tom opened the door a bit, calling to the driver:

"Say, old man, tell Tony I want a room—ser-clooded one. Do yer ketch?"

"I'm on."

"I gotter stay here an' look arter our sick friend," added the Slugger.

The cabby dropped to the ground and hurried into a side door of Tony Smike's resort. In a few moments he returned and informed Duke it was all right.

The pugilist got out of the cab and glanced around. It happened to be a favorable moment for his purpose, as there seemed to be no one in the immediate vicinity. He quickly lifted Irma from the cab and hurried in by the darkened door.

Tony Smike himself was on hand.

"What's the lay, Duke?" he demanded, suspiciously. "Is she full?"

"As a queen," was the instant retort. "She's had der jims, an' she jest piled der stuff inter her till she was flat."

"Is this straight?"

"Sure."

"I didn't know but it was somethin' crooked."

You know I can't afford to take too big chances, for the police have their eyes on this place. There have been complaints. It's only my pull that keeps the doors open."

"This is all right," assured Duke. "She gits crazy as a bug sometimes, but she'll be all right arter her reg'ler comes."

"Her reg'ler?"

"Der bloke wot she's stuck on."

"Then it ain't you?"

"No; it's Bob Booth. You know Bob?"

"Yes."

"Den youse know he's der right sort. Let me have a room where I can put dis lady—a room where it won't do no hurt if she makes a devil of a row w'en she gits over dis racket. She's noisy w'en she has her tantrums."

"All right, Foller."

Up two flights of stairs they went, and then they reached the room. Smike lighted the gas, and then Tom saw there was not a window in one of the walls. Light and air came in by a window in the roof, that was far beyond the reach of any one who might occupy the room.

"These walls are extra thick," explained the proprietor of the place. "All the vellin' that's done in here won't be apt to disturb anybody else in the place, for you see the doors are double, one openin' inter the room an' the other out of it, and they close against each other, makin' two thicknesses."

"Dis is great!" exclaimed the Slugger, with satisfaction.

"There's bin some things done in this room what I hope the walls'll never tell," significantly declared Tony Smike.

The unconscious girl was placed on the bed, and then Smike gave Tom the keys. They went out, leaving Irma alone in her prison.

Duke's first act was to settle with the cabman, who was patiently waiting at the door.

"Here's a fiver, Pety," he said, as he gave the driver a crisp bill. "Let dat keep yer mouth closed."

"All right, old man. I know my biz."

Duke went back.

"I don't like ter go off an' leave dat gal in a faint," he muttered. "Wot if she took a noshun not ter come out of it? Holy jee!"

He hurried up to the room where he had left Irma, hastily unlocking the doors. When he stepped into the room, he was startled and relieved to find the unlucky girl sitting up on the bed. She stared at him in a dazed way.

"Howdy-do, miss," bowed the Slugger, his awkwardness pronounced. "I'm glad to see you've come round."

She stared hard at him and then looked around once more before speaking.

"How did I come in this place?" she finally asked, her calmness surprising him.

"You was brought here," evasively answered Duke.

"Not by Double-voice Dan?"

"Not exactly," confessed the pugilist.

Irma put her hand to her head and seemed thinking.

"Something happened I don't seem to remember. What was it?"

"Yer mustn't ask too menny questions now, miss. It'll all be told to you later."

"But I must know now—I demand to know! I seem to remember crossing the ferry, and then—add then—"

She paused, puzzled again. The color was coming back into her cheeks, and she made a very pretty picture. Tom Duke felt the sluggish blood stirring in his veins, and an evil light began to glow in his eyes.

"Hanged if you ain't a beaut!" he cried, admiringly. "I don't wonder Broadway Bob is stuck on yer!"

She started.

"You are one of Robert Booth's friends?"

Duke bowed.

"Then I understand it all! I have fallen into his vile hands through some mischance of fate! Oh, Heaven! After all the struggle to escape him!"

She seemed overcome for a moment, and then she arose to her feet.

"Open that door!" she commanded.

"W'ot yer goin' ter do?"

"Leave this place."

"Don't be in a hurry," half-grinned the Slugger.

"I will go!"

"Mebbe so; but Bob'll have ter say when."

She suddenly covered her face with her hands, her slender body swaying with the force of her emotions. The sight was too much for Tom Duke, and he crept stealthily toward her, the evil light in his eyes grown to a glare.

She heard him and started back. In a moment she read his intent in his face, and she realized her great peril. In another moment she had snatched a revolver from her bosom and thrust the muzzle within a foot of Duke's head.

"Try to touch me, and as there is a Heaven above, I will shoot you dead!" she cried.

He hesitated, and yet he intended to spring upon her, risking a shot; but there was a deadly look in her eyes, and despite her excitement, he saw her hand did not quiver in the least. Something told him she would really shoot.

Irma suddenly exclaimed:

"Get back—get back, you wretch! If you don't, I will end your life in an instant! I believe I will shoot you anyway!"

Duke retreated in real alarm.

"For God's sake don't shoot!" he gasped. He was a coward when it came to facing a deadly weapon.

"I guess I'll leave this cat fer Bob ter handle," he muttered, as he suddenly plunged out through the doors, closing and locking both behind him.

When he was gone, Irma sunk sobbing and moaning on the bed, her strength completely gone.

"Thank Heaven Dan Downing gave me this revolver!" she exclaimed, being unable to express her gratitude over her escape.

Still, she was a captive.

Tom Duke lost no time in getting back to New York and hunting up Broadway Bob. The astonishment and delight of the Rounder when he heard Duke's story cannot be described.

"You're a brick, Tom!" he declared. "I'll fatten your purse for this little piece of work!"

Tom turned over the keys of the room where Irma was confined, and not much time was lost before Broadway Bob was on his way to Jersey City.

It was morning when the Rounder reached Tony Smike's; but he seemed utterly tireless. He at once proceeded to the room where his bird was caged.

Exhausted nature had asserted itself, and she was sleeping peacefully on the bed when he entered. He had thought it barely possible Tom Duke had made a blunder, but he saw the Slugger had really secured the kidnapped girl.

Bob stood looking down on her for some time. "She shall not have one charge against me," he muttered, "even though she is helpless and in my power. Why should I hasten, when she will soon be legally mine? I do not propose to lose my hold on her now until she is my wife. After that, I can snap my fingers in the face of Dan Downing. With old Webster's wealth at my disposal, I will be able to cover my tracks and live beyond the reach of the law. If not, then the money will aid me to get out of the country in a hurry."

Irma stirred, smiled in her sleep and softly murmured a name.

"Harold!"

"So she dreams of him!" grated the dark-faced man by the bedside. "Well, let her dream! I know my power, which is a secret to all others. No one suspects the truth. When Irma marries me, it will apparently be of her own free will. Ha! ha! ha!"

His laughter awoke the sleeping girl. She started up and saw him standing there.

"Robert Booth!" she cried.

He bowed, smiling.

"At your service, Miss Webster."

"Then take me to my home and my father," she demanded, facing him.

"In due time."

"Now—at once!"

"That will delay our marriage."

"Marriage! Do you think I will marry you?"

"I know you will."

"Never!"

"That is an easy word to speak, but it means a great deal. You will marry me within three days."

"I will take my own life first!"

"Ah! that reminds me Tom said you had a pistol. Give it to me."

"I will not!"

He fixed his eyes on hers.

"Give it to me!"

She hesitated, seeming to struggle against a will stronger than her own. She tried to turn away, but could not do so. Her hand went to her breast and she took out the revolver, which she passed to Broadway Bob.

He smiled.

"Will you be ready to marry me in three days?" he asked.

Mechanically she answered:

"Yes."

He had proven his power.

CHAPTER XXI.

A NEW MOVE IN THE GAME.

IRMA remained very passively in that prison-room, while Bob Booth returned to New York. He had decided on the course he would pursue.

For two days Broadway Bob was seen about his familiar haunts, and all his old acquaintances spoke of the change in his appearance.

Meantime, the police were searching for the missing girl, but, truth to tell, they had not struck upon the ghost of a clue. However, the newspapers declared the officers were on a "hot scent" and it could not be a great while before they discovered Calvin Webster's beautiful daughter and brought the daring kidnappers to justice.

The father's manner was so strange that the papers and the public commented on it freely. Ever since the vanishing of his child he had seemed in a dazed condition, taking no measures to urge on the search and not even showing the ordinary signs of grief. Some declared his brain was affected by the shock, but this idea was generally scoffed at.

At regular intervals Broadway Bob visited the

Madison avenue mansion and talked privately with Mr. Webster; but just what passed between them on these occasions no one but themselves could have told.

As for Double-voice Dan, the detective seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth. The Rounder urged Bob Sleek to do his best to discover the whereabouts of the Go-It-Alone Detective, and the Shadow Sneak assured his employer he had made every effort and failed.

"I don't believe Downing is in New York," Sleek asserted. "If he were, I could find him or get some trace of him. I have not been able to do so, sir."

"Keep at it, and report to me as often as possible. Try your luck in Jersey City."

"What could take him there?"

"It doesn't make any difference what could take him there! That is nothing to you. I tell you to look for him there, and that settles it."

"Of course—of course," Sleek meekly agreed. "Only I didn't want to waste my time and be taking your money."

"Don't let that worry you. Just do as I tell you, and it will be all right."

Then Sleek disappeared, evidently going into Jersey.

The Rounder found Game Gus in Murdock's. "You are the very man I am looking for," Bob asserted.

"Want to scare up a little game?" inquired the sport.

"I have a big game on my hands now, and I want to take you in."

"Count on me, if there is a chance for sport and possible boodle."

"I do not mean the kind of a game you are thinking of, Gus. There is boodle in the one I am playing. As for the sport of it, that is according to the way you look at it."

"Let me in."

"I have done you more than one good turn, eh?"

"Sure."

"I want a favor, and I came to you because I knew I could rely on you. Tom Duke already knows the lay, but I don't dare trust a beautiful girl in his charge. Tom might forget I was a friend."

"So there is a girl in the case? What—not the girl?"

"Exactly."

"But I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought. Come with me where we can talk it over without a possibility of being overheard."

Together they left Murdock's.

At a late hour that night, Broadway Bob and Game Gus crossed into Jersey. Apparently they had come to an understanding and an agreement.

They took a car at the ferry, and it was not a great while before Bob fancied he discerned a familiar figure on the front end. A closer inspection revealed the fact that the man looked like Sleek, the Shadower.

"I wonder what the fellow is up to now," thought Bob. And then he told Game Gus of his discovery.

"I don't want him to see me," said the Rounder. "We will drop off the car quietly."

They proceeded to do so, slipping down a side street. Still Bob was uneasy and kept glancing back in a covert manner.

"Sleek is all right in his place, but I don't fancy his getting onto too many of my secrets," said Booth. "The fellow might take a fancy to sell me out."

They hastened into a dark alley and concealed themselves. Within a few moments a figure came swiftly down the alley, peering to the right and left. They crouched low and allowed the man to pass. When he had disappeared, they hastened back to the street again and went on.

"That was Sleek," said Broadway Bob. "He was dogging me! I had a great notion to give him a tap on the head that would teach him better, but I didn't want the fuss. I shall have to give him the bounce before he gets a hold on me."

"I fancy that would be a good plan," agreed the gambler.

They made their way to Tony Smike's and Bob visited Irma, while Game Gus waited below.

"Get ready for a long journey," commanded the Rounder.

She lifted her eyes beseechingly to his, but the words she would have spoken died on her lips. Within two days she had lost much of her peach-like bloom, but she was still beautiful.

"I don't think it is good for you to be shut up here," added the man; "and so I am going to give you a taste of country life. Before morning, we will be more than twenty-five miles from here."

Her face remained impassive. The thought of escaping from that dismal prison chamber did not seem to cheer her in the least. There was a dreamy haze over her eyes, and she appeared like one in a trance.

In a short time, Irma was ready to leave the room.

"Now," said Broadway Bob, "you are my invalid sister. Do you understand?"

She slowly bowed.

"If any one questions you, your name is Marion Berkley. Now, what is your name?"

"Marion Berkley."

"You must remember that. You look rather pale, and you must have a languid air. You are threatened with consumption."

She bowed again.

"Who am I?" questioned Bob.

"You are my brother."

"Your very dear brother; remember that. My name is Jack."

He assisted her in descending the stairs, and she leaned heavily on his arm, seeming indeed like a semi-invalid. At the foot of the second flight Game Gus was waiting.

"Hello, old man!" he called, as if he had just seen Bob for the first time. "Where are you going?"

"On a little trip."

"Who is this lady with you?"

"I am his sister, sir," replied Irma, slowly.

"This is my very dear brother, and his name is Jack."

The two men exchanged significant glances, and Game Gus muttered beneath his breath:

"Booth is the devil!"

They went out together, entering a cab that stood at the door. They were taken directly to the West End, where they took a train for the northern part of the State.

Bob breathed freely when Jersey City was left behind and they were rolling through the night.

"You are playing a desperate game," guardedly declared the gambler.

"The stake is well worth the venture," was the reply. "I am not suspected. If I had not been pressed for time, I should have taken her out here with a carriage, instead of on the train; but I must be back in New York at an early hour. No one suspects me, except Dan Downing, and he has disappeared in a singular manner. I hope he is dead!"

"I hope so for our sakes."

When the conductor came around, Bob asked him if they stopped anywhere in Rockaway Valley.

"No night trains stop there," was the reply.

"What are you going to do?" asked Gus, when the official had passed on.

"Get off at the nearest stop and hire a team," answered the Rounder.

This they did. The chief rascal seemed to know exactly where he was going, for he gave the driver minute directions. However, in order not to arouse any suspicion, they left the carriage at a farm-house, more than a mile from their real destination, pretending they meant to stop there.

When the carriage had disappeared in the darkness that lay over the winding road, they set out on foot.

In the most lonely portion of Rockaway Valley stood an old house that was deserted and bore the reputation of being haunted. Some years before, the owner of the place had been brutally murdered there, and no one had lived in the old house since. Strange stories were told concerning it, for it was said the spirit of the murdered man lingered about his old home.

To this house the strange trio made their way. It was plainly evident the Rounder had been there before. And that dismal place was to be Irma's prison!

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MAN FROM HOBOKUS.

As he had planned, Broadway Bob was back in New York at an early hour. He had managed to snatch some sleep on the return trip, and a bath made him appear as fresh and smiling as was his usual wont. Looking into his handsome face, no one could have imagined him the villain he actually was.

"I am confident the police are on the right track at last," he told a chance acquaintance, who met him and spoke of the missing girl. "I have every reason to believe Irma Webster has not been harmed, and she may be restored to me within twenty-four hours. I trust so."

Sleek, the Shadow Sneak, turned up.

"I saw you in Jersey City last night," the shadow promptly declared, "and I tried to get a chance to speak with you; but you slipped me some way."

"Why did you wish to speak with me?"

"I had spotted Dan Downing."

"Is this true?"

"You can bet your life on it!"

"Where did you see him?"

"In Jersey City."

"What part of Jersey?"

"When I saw him he was hanging around Tony Smike's."

"The deuce!"

Broadway Bob was startled.

"You aren't stringing me, Sleek?"

"Not a bit."

"Why didn't you keep close watch of Downing?"

"He tumbled to me."

"You must have bungled."

"I didn't; but he suspects I am working against him."

"Then you must disguise yourself, man! Dan Downing is the sharpest detective living! Hanging around Tony Smike's! Great blazes!"

The Rounder was agitated. He now wished he had allowed the Shadow to overtake them the night before, for if Downing had been in the vicinity of Smike's it was pretty certain the Double-voice Detective had struck the scent.

"I got Irma away from there just in the nick of time," thought Bob. "But I wonder if I was followed? Had I dreamed Dan Downing was anywhere about I would have disguised myself and Irma."

"Did you have an encounter with Downing?" he asked Sleek.

"No; he suddenly vanished."

"Well, here is more money. Get after him again, and don't let him give you the slip. Have you got nerve, Sleek?"

"I think so."

"Enough to tap a man on the head?"

"That depends on the kind of a chance I get."

"The chance?"

"Yes; whether he's looking or not. I will add, the inducements amount to something." Mr. Sleek winked and grimaced in a manner intended to be highly significant.

"There is a certain man I would like to have disposed of, Sleek."

"I think I know him."

"I think you do. If you could manage to bring me proof that he had croaked you might receive a valuable present."

The sneak nodded and rubbed his hands together.

"Um—ah! About how valuable?" he inquired.

"Say five hundred dollars."

"Um—ah!" grunted Sleek again. A thousand would be greater inducement."

"Five hundred is the limit."

"Well, I will think of it. It is quite possible an accident will happen to the gentleman you are thinking of just now."

The information he had received concerning Double-voice Dan made Broadway Bob terribly uneasy.

"One never knows just when that man is going to strike," he thought. "I begin to feel as if I was followed out into Jersey. If that is true, he will regain possession of Irma again, which would upset all my plans. By Jove! I do not dare keep her there until after we are married, as I originally intended to do. I must work some other scheme."

He thought it all over and decided to bring the girl back to New York without delay.

"She will swear to any kind of a story I compel her to, and I will fake up a yarn about tracking down the kidnappers and rescuing her from them. That will make me a hero in the eyes of the public, and the newspapers will emblazon my glory."

He was delighted with the scheme, but he feared he was being watched by Dan Downing or some other spy. This caused him to take great pains in securing what he considered a very good disguise. He left New York and reached Jersey by a roundabout course, thinking he would throw any shadower and avoid suspicion in that manner.

The street lamps were beginning to twinkle when the Rounder ordered soup in a second-class restaurant in Jersey City. He was hungry, but his make-up would not allow him to eat in a first-class place.

"I'll throw off all disguise the minute I start back toward New York with Irma," he thought. "Then I shall not fear Dan Downing, for she will be an unconscious ally."

When he had satisfied his hunger, he paid his check and made for the railroad station. A short time later, he was being carried out into Northern New Jersey once more.

The train made a brief stop at Boonton Falls, and there Bob got off. He thought of hiring a team to take him to Powerville, but decided not to do so.

"I'll foot it," he muttered.

The distance was not great.

He started out at a swinging pace, and Boonton Falls was soon left behind.

The Rounder was thinking deeply, and he did not glance back for some time. Finally he did so, and he was startled to see a figure suddenly sink into the darkness at the side of the road.

He was being followed.

"Ten to one it is Downing!" he grated, savagely. "What shall I do?"

He walked on, as if he had not noticed anything, and all the while he was busily thinking over the discovery he had made.

Before he had gone a great distance he came to a sort of wayside inn.

"I'll stop here," he decided.

Entering the place, he discovered some men playing cards in the room where liquor was sold. He ordered a drink and pretended to watch the game.

It was not long before a man dressed like a Jersey farmer came slouching in. He was a rather disreputable-looking old man, his clothes being soiled and greasy. Around his neck a dirty bandanna handkerchief was tied, with the ends of which he wiped his mouth after drinking the cider he ordered at the bar.

Without pretending to do so, Broadway Bob covertly scanned the new-comer. The old man combed his tobacco-stained whiskers with his fingers and took a position where he could watch the game of cards. Bob saw something suspicious in the fact that, although the farmer seemed quite at home there, none of the men within the place appeared to know him.

"I'd like to get a yank at those whiskers and see if they would come off," thought the disguised Rounder.

Knowing how skillful Dan Downing was at disguising himself, the naturalness of the farmer's get-up did not impress Bob at all. Finally, the rascal resolved to make a move.

"You don't seem to be playin', old man," he said, with an affected accent. "S'pose you come up an' have a drink with me."

"I don't usually make a practice of drinkin' with strangers," he said; "but you look all right, an' I'm purty gaul-darned dry ter-night, so I don't mind."

They moved up to the bar, and the old man ordered cider once more, while Bob called for whisky.

"B'long round here?" asked the Rounder.

"Nope. B'long up in Hohokus. Jest down this way to see 'bout a farm I'm thinkin' of buyin'; but I find this more of a millin' then a farmin' country. If I had plenty of money, I'd start a new mill in Powerville, banged if I wouldn't!"

"I'll send you to start a new mill in Sheol!" snarled Broadway Bob, as he suddenly snatched out a wicked-looking knife and made a lunge at the throat of the other.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DESPERATE BATTLE.

AN ordinary man would have been taken quite off his guard by the rapid movement of the disguised rascal, but the man from Hohokus seemed quite prepared for it, as he caught the Rounder's wrist with fingers that seemed to have a grip of steel.

"Well, I'm darned!" he gasped, as if greatly astonished. Then he whirled Broadway Bob around and caught him by the collar and a convenient portion of the pantaloons. The next moment the would-be assassin was being run across the room in a most ignominious manner.

Straight for an open window the old fellow ran the Rounder. When the window was reached, Bob felt himself lifted and thrust headlong through it, to fall heavily to the ground outside.

"Darned if I'll ever take another drink with a stranger!" declared the old farmer, as, with a sudden show of fear, he quickly sneaked out at the door, leaving the astonished witnesses of the affair to stare at each other and wonder what it all meant.

Bob, who was slightly stunned, slowly picked himself up, not fully comprehending what had happened. Suddenly he snatched out a revolver and arose to his feet, looking in at the window, hoping to see the man who had handled him so ruthlessly.

The farmer had disappeared.

Fuming with rage, the discomfited and humiliated Rounder made a dash around the inn, hoping to find some trace of the one who had used him so unceremoniously.

He made a complete round of the building, but found no sign of the farmer from Hohokus.

The men within the place had stopped their game and come out to see what had become of the two men, so Bob hastened away, having no desire to answer questions.

"I know that was Double-voice Dan!" he kept telling himself.

Time after time, he paused to look back, feeling that he was still followed; but, if this were true, he saw no further sign of the shadower.

"I'll fix him yet!" grated Bob.

He left the main road and struck across the valley. Knowing just where the haunted house stood, he took the shortest cut to reach it.

Before long the grim outlines of the old place loomed up before him, looking sullen and forbidding. Near the house two dead trees stretched their bare skeleton arms up into the night.

Booth paused to look up at a certain window. No light shone from it, and he muttered his satisfaction.

"Gus is a good man—reliable as a clock. He has taken pains to double-curtain the window, as I instructed."

He made his way around to the back door and readily gained admittance. Something caused him to take a fancy to creep cautiously up the stairs.

When he was near the top, the sound of voices came to his ears.

He started and listened.

"The deuce and all!" he muttered. "What is the meaning of that?"

Then his hand sought out his revolver once more, while he crept swiftly but silently forward.

The voices came from a certain room, toward which the Rounder made his way.

"Irma, Irma!" some one was saying. "Why do you act so strangely? Don't you know me?"

"Of course I know you," was the low reply.

"I have come here to save you," the first speaker went on. "Inch by inch I have traced

you, without the aid of a living soul. You cannot understand my joy when I found I had discovered you at last. I will take you back to your father and your home."

"Mr. Booth will take me back."

"Booth? Has he promised you that? I thought you his captive."

"I thought so once. He told me I was his sister and his name was Jack. When he had brought me here, he told me I was not his sister, but that he intended to make me his wife."

"Great Heaven! How strange you appear! Irma, Irma! has what you have passed through turned your brain? You would not marry Bob Booth?"

"Oh, yes, I would."

"Have you forgotten you are promised to me? You said you would never change."

"I—I don't seem to remember."

"Then your brain must be truly affected! Is all my work to amount to nothing? I have captured your guard, and he is now a helpless prisoner, bound hand and foot and gagged. There is not the slightest reason in the world why you should not leave this house within five minutes and be in your own home in a few hours. I am determined you shall go. Whether you are willing or not, I will take you back to New York!"

"I'll bet you ten to one you don't do anything of the kind, Harold St. Clair!" cried Broadway Bob, as he suddenly sprung into the room.

St. Clair it was who had found the kidnapped girl and was attempting to induce her to return to the city with him. He wheeled to face the Rounder.

"Bob Booth!"

"Right here," fell from Bob's lips. "So you have been playing detective on your own hook, St. Clair?"

"I have."

"You will wish you hadn't, directly."

"I knew you for a consummate villain, Bob Booth, but I fail to understand your real motive in keeping a prisoner the girl whom, by some vile means, you forced to consent to a marriage with you."

"My motives are nothing to you."

"Will you allow me to take her back to the city?"

Booth laughed sneeringly.

"Do you think I am a fool? You are liable never to see New York again, my gentle dove!"

"What do you mean?"

"It is possible you do not yet fully understand the kind of a man I am. I have you foul!"

There was a fiendish ring to the villain's voice, and Harold understood him then.

There was to be a battle between them!

"Come on!" the younger man cried, boldly facing the other. "May the best man win!"

Bob accepted the challenge and sprung at Harold's throat. They grappled, and a desperate life-struggle began.

Irma sat still and watched the struggle, scarcely seeming to take any interest in the fierce encounter that really meant so much to her.

Like mad creatures, the rivals surged and swayed; their eyes glaring and their breathing growing quicker. Round and round they whirled, neither seeming to have the advantage at first.

Strangely enough, Bob Booth seemed to have forgotten he possessed any other weapons than those given him by nature. His one great desire appeared to be to get his fingers on Harold's throat.

"I'll fix you!" he grated.

Harold made no reply, but seemed to redouble his efforts. Instead of abating in the least, the battle waxed fiercer and fiercer.

The most deadly hatred was expressed on the Rounder's face, while there was anything but a light of love in Harold's eyes. Once the younger man forced his foe upon his knees, but, with a mighty effort, Bob arose to his feet again, and the fight continued.

More than one heavy blow was dealt, and Harold drew the first blood.

The floor of the chamber was loose in places, and the boards rattled beneath their feet. Once both slipped and fell, striking on their sides so violently the whole house trembled. Had either been dazed by that fall the other would have swiftly proved himself the victor in the battle, but they immediately arose to their knees, where they clutched each other again, and the terrible encounter continued.

After a bit both managed to get upon their feet. They were breathing like overworked cart-horses, but their efforts were not abating. It began to seem as if the battle would be one of endurance, the man with the best "wind" coming out the victor.

"You may as well give up," declared Broadway Bob. "You'll have to go under in the end."

"That's where you fool yourself," was the firm reply. "I'll show you I am as good a man as you are—and a little better!"

It really began to seem that Harold spoke the truth. While he appeared to be getting his second wind, as it were, Bob showed, for the first time, that the fight was telling on him.

The Rounder realized that he was failing, and he made one last mad surge.

Fortune favored him.

A loose board tipped and sent Harold staggering backward.

Bob was quick to grasp the advantage, and a telling blow caused Harold to go crashing to the floor.

In an instant the panting Rounder drove his bended knee into the pit of the fallen man's stomach and fastened his sinewy hands on Harold's throat.

"Ha! ha!" rung out the evil laugh of the successful villain. "What do you think about getting back to New York now?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

LEFT TO THE RATS.

HAROLD ST. CLAIR could not reply, for the shock of the fall, the jab of his enemy's knee and the strangling strength of the hands on his throat robbed him of the power of speech. He felt his senses swiftly slipping away, and the thought came over him that his last hour had come, for Bob Booth certainly meant to murder him.

That thought caused the dazed and conquered man to make one more wild surge to throw off his bitter enemy and tear those choking fingers from his windpipe.

He was partially successful, but it was only for a moment. Then the Rounder forced him down again.

"It's no use!" grated Booth, with fierce joy. "I've got you foul!"

The fingers closed on Harold's throat once more. The luckless young man could not breathe, and all the blood in his body seemed rushing to his head, which felt as if it would burst with the terrible pressure. He saw crimson colored clouds floating before his eyes, and then came a blank.

When he became conscious once more, he found himself bound hands and feet and lying helpless on his back. A dim light showed him he was no longer in the chamber of the haunted house. He was stretched upon the dank ground and a wall of stones and cement was close beside him. The air of the place was heavy with moist and mold.

He looked around for Irma. She was not there, but the dim light showed him the evil figure of Broadway Bob sitting on a box near at hand.

The Rounder gave a grunt when he saw his captive was conscious.

"Took you long enough to come around," he growled. "I have been waiting to tell you some things that I know will make you feel mighty pleasant and comfortable."

Harold gazed at the other scornfully, but did not speak.

"Oh, you can't knock me out with dagger looks," laughed Bob, the dim light making his handsome face have a decidedly fiendish aspect, while the huge shadow he cast on the wall of stones looked like a silhouette of the Evil One. "I have you right where I want you, Mr. Harold St. Clair. How do you think you will like to remain here, instead of going back to New York with Irma?"

"You dog!"

The Rounder started a bit.

"Better keep your tongue between your teeth, if you feel like calling names, St. Clair!" he said. "I am in the position to make you swallow your words."

"If you think so, you make the mistake of your life. You can't make me swallow anything. The tortures of the fiery pit would not make me retract for you!"

"You still have spirit."

"What did you expect? An accident gave you the advantage just when you were failing up. In a few moments more, I would have had you foul."

"I will say one thing, St. Clair, and that is that I misjudged your fighting ability. You are a better man than I thought."

"And you are a bigger villain than I ever imagined. That is saying lots."

"This seems to be a case where rascality pays," laughed Bob. "It is only in novels virtue always triumphs. I have found that in real life the crooks have the fattest times, while honest men sweat and toil, gaining nothing worth having and dying in the midst of their wretchedness."

"You think so now, but this game has not been played through to the end. At last you may be defeated, and justice and honesty may triumph over you."

"Well, one thing is sure: you won't be on hand to enjoy my downfall. Your bones will rot in the cellar of Rockaway Valley's haunted house."

"Then you mean to murder me?"

"No."

"What?"

"I am going to leave you to the rats!"

Harold shuddered.

"That will be murder!" he declared.

"You may look at it that way; I don't mind. I will give you something to think of after you are left here alone. I am going to take Irma back to New York and marry her."

She has agreed to help me out in a little plot I have arranged. I shall tell the gullible public how I rescued her from the wicked men who kidnapped her, and she will declare it is true. The story will be believed, and I shall be regarded as a lion. The wedding has been delayed somewhat, but she is willing to have it come off as soon as is proper after her restoration to her father's arms."

Harold's eyes seemed to pierce the triumphant speaker through and through. For some time both were silent, and then the helpless man cried:

"What hellish spell have you placed upon that girl?"

"What spell?"

"Yes."

"None."

"You lie!"

The Rounder started to his feet and lifted one foot as if to set his heel upon Harold's lips; but the captive did not flinch in the least.

Bob hesitated.

"What is the use?" he finally cried. "It wouldn't be any satisfaction. Your tongue can't hurt me."

"Nothing can hurt you! You are utterly beyond shame!"

"Fire away! This is the last chance you will get."

"Don't be too sure of that. The only way you can be certain is to murder me before you leave me."

"Do you really think so? That is where you fool yourself. This old house is supposed to be haunted, and none of the people hereabouts will venture near it. If one should happen to stray close enough to hear your cries for help, he would flee in terror from the spot, thinking he had surely heard the voice of a spook. So you see, my dear St. Clair, it will be a sure way of getting rid of you to leave you here in the cellar for the rats to feast upon."

"And do you think you will escape your just deserts in the end? Then you deceive yourself, for just as sure as time continues, you will meet with retribution! You may stand there and smile in that sardonic way, but I am telling you the truth. The road of crime may seem smooth and pleasant for a time, but it is sure to bring the wretch who chooses it to the hell of retribution!"

"Bravo, St. Clair! You should have been a preacher! Still, let me say before I take my leave, I rather admire your nerve. I did think milk and water ran in your veins, but I reckon there's good blood there."

"Thank you for nothing. I put no value on those words, coming from your lips. I had rather you would hate than admire me."

"I don't doubt it, and that makes me admire you all the more. Still, I am not fool enough to let my feelings lead me into any soft action. I recognize you as a foe whom I must dispose of and that is why I leave you here. As for Dan Downing—Ha! you start at his name! Perhaps you fancy he may save you! If so, you may as well dismiss the hope, for I finished him this night."

There was a question in the eyes of the helpless man.

"Yes, I finished him," lied Bob. "He was dogging me, disguised as a Jersey farmer. I laid for him and gave him the length of my knife in the heart, after which I threw his body into Rockaway River. He will not bother me any more."

"Oh, I tell you the game is all mine!"

Harold bit his lips until the blood came. It was hard to have to lie there helpless and listen to the gloating words of the triumphant rascal.

Bob saw the look on the captive's face and rightly interpreted its meaning, whereupon he laughed.

"Well, I must leave you now," he said, taking up the bit of candle. "Try to make yourself as comfortable as possible until the rats come. You will hear them squealing and rustling as they come out of the wall and creep toward you. I wonder how loud you will yell when the first one takes a nibble at you! Ha! ha! ha! So long, St. Clair. See you in—you know where."

Then he departed from the cellar, leaving Harold to a terrible fate. The helpless man watched his bitter foe until Booth disappeared up the stairs, and then he listened to the villain's dying footsteps. The sounds grew fainter and fainter until he could hear them no longer, and Harold was alone with darkness and silence in the dark cellar.

Alone?

The rats were there!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE VAIL IS LIFTED.

ASCENDING to the chamber where the struggle with Harold had taken place, Broadway Bob found Game Gus and Irma there. The gambler looked a trifle the worse for wear, having a handkerchief bound around his head.

"What did you do with the fellow?" he asked.

"Left him in the cellar," was Bob's reply.

"What will become of him? He will starve."

"I don't think so. There are probably rats about this old place. They will take care of him."

Gus shuddered.

"That is tough!" he declared.

"Do you feel like letting him loose?" asked the Rounder, the question being a sneer.

"Well, I should say not! Great jiggers! what a slug he did give me on the head! Knocked me silly, and when I came round, he had me tied up helpless as a kitten. I thought he held all the fancy cards then and I was out of the game."

"I happened along just in time."

"You saved the pot. He would have cleaned the board in a short time more."

"Well, we will return to New York now. There is no reason why we should bother ourselves any more about him. It is pretty certain he won't bother us any more."

In a short time they were ready to start, and the haunted house of Rockaway Valley was left behind.

At the nearest possible place, they secured a team and were driven to the first railway station. There they took a train for Newark, going over the Morris & Essex.

It happened the train was delayed somewhat, and they did not reach Newark as soon as they expected. However, it was not so very long before they were in Jersey City once more.

"Everything is all right," laughed the Rounder. "We will be in New York shortly."

Then Game Gus made the startling assertion that he believed they were shadowed.

"Impossible!" cried Bob, startled despite himself.

"I don't know about that," returned the sport. "I think a cab followed us from the railway station here to the ferry."

"Did you notice the people who were in the cab?"

"Two men got out. I spotted one of them."

"Keep your eyes on him."

More and more certain became the gambler that they were followed.

"We are going to have trouble," he said, as the ferry-boat was taking them across the river.

"The man who interferes with me had better order his coffin!" growled Broadway Bob.

Irma wore a veil, and the chief rascal had instructed her to keep it down. She was a pretty girl, and he knew she would attract a large amount of attention, being seen with two men at that hour of the night. If she took any interest in what was going on she did not betray the fact in any way.

The Rounder grew nervous.

"If there is anything makes me hot it is to be spotted," he declared. "Gus, you must keep those fellows from interfering with us when we reach the New York side."

"All right. I have lost track of them just now, but I will hunt them up and make trouble if I fancy they are going to chip in on this deal."

"That's right. Do anything to keep them off me till I get Irma into a cab. The moment I do that I am all right."

When the boat ran into the slip the gambler was watching a man he believed had been in the pursuing cab. Bob and Irma were among the first to reach the ground, and Gus saw his man following swiftly.

"I'll get in my work right now!" he thought, as he ran forward and grasped the stranger by the collar.

"Give me back my watch!" shouted the sport in the ear of the astonished man.

In another moment he was engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter with the fellow he had grasped.

Broadway Bob hurried Irma toward a cab which happened to be lingering near the outer gate.

"Keb, sir, ket?" called the driver.

The Rounder nodded.

"Just hold steady till I tell you to start," he said. "I expect a friend along in a minute."

"All right, sir."

Bob assisted Irma into the cab and closed the door.

"I wonder if Gus will need any of my assistance," he muttered, as he stood looking back at the surging knot of men gathered where the row was taking place. "He must get out of that before a copper shows up."

Then to his ears came a signal for aid.

"Great Scott! he's getting the worst of it!"

But he had not gone far toward the scene of the encounter before Gus came running toward him, his hat mashed over his eyes and his coat torn.

"Three to one are too many!" exclaimed the gambler. "That fellow had friends, and they gave me fits."

"Think he was following us?"

"Guess not. That was my blunder."

"Well, get on here lively, and we'll get out."

"I'll not go inside."

"Outside—behind—anywhere; sort of a body-guard."

"Down with the trunk-rack! This is all right."

Game Gus was "cranky" sometimes, and, having taken a fancy to ride that way, Bob knew it would be useless to urge him to get in.

The Rounder opened the door and entered the cab, which was soon on Canal street.

Feeling that everything was all right, Bob turned to his companion, who lay back in a dark corner of the cab, still having the vail down. The Rounder had not attempted to make love to the girl while she was his captive. Feeling sure she would soon be legally his, he had not considered it necessary to hasten with his wooing.

But now he took a fancy to show his ardor somewhat.

"We are almost home, darling," he murmured, his voice now being soft and musical. "You will soon be with your father."

An indistinct murmur came from the corner. "You know I love you more than all else in the wide world, and I will do my best to make you perfectly happy when you are my own dear little wife."

A strangely-smothered sound came from the corner. Was it possible Irma was laughing at him?

Suddenly catching hold of the curtain, he ran it up, allowing the glare of the electric lights to sift in at the window.

"Lift your vail, dearest! I want to see your sweet face once more!"

The vail was suddenly lifted.

"Hell's furies!" gasped Broadway Bob, as he fell back in the opposite corner.

His companion was not Irma, but—
Double-voice Dan!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TALKING CYLINDER.

Bob's strength had completely deserted him, and he lay back staring at the Go-It-Alone Detective as if he saw a ghost.

Downing snatched the vail and hat from his head and flung them at his feet.

"I don't hardly think you cared so very much about seeing my *sweet face*," he softly laughed, as the cab rumbled over the stones.

"You—you—devil!" panted the Rounder.

"Ha! ha! ha! It was only a moment ago you were calling me darling and dearest. Ha! ha! ha! This is really the best joke I ever had anything to do with! Why, Bobbie, you were actually getting spoony on me! I never dreamed you loved me more than all else in the wide world! Ha! ha! ha!"

Nothing could have cut and humiliated the rascal like the laughter of this man whom he hated so intensely. And to think he had been saying such things to his most uncompromising enemy. The thought was maddening.

But suddenly, just as the Rounder was going to make a clutch at Dan's throat, the electric lights glinted on something bright in the detective's hand.

It was a revolver!

"Now don't kick up a fuss, Robert," advised the ferret. "It won't do any good, and you may get hurt in the fracas, or thereabouts. I generally go loaded for b'ar, and it doesn't take much to make me harmful."

"How in thunder did you work it?" asked the still puzzled rascal.

"I knew that would bother you. It was dead easy. I was watching for a chance, and it came when you started to assist your pal, after putting the girl into the cab. I snapped her out then and turned her over to a friend, only retaining her hat and vail, so I might take her place."

"But how did you happen to be on hand? I—I thought—"

"You thought the 'man from Hohokus' was away out in the Jersey wilderness somewhere, eh?"

"Then you were really that old jay?"

"The old jay was Dan."

"Then I don't understand how you came back here."

"Possibly not. I may do lots of things you won't understand. But it was easy getting back to Jersey City after you gave me the slip. I watched for you, and I was fortunate in striking you the moment you appeared. That was all!"

"Then you *did* follow us from the Jersey side?"

"Just about."

"Curse you!"

"Your curses are music! And you were so loving a short time ago! Oh, Bobbie, how changeable you are!"

The Rounder fairly writhed in torture.

"You are having your turn now!" he snarled, all the music gone from his voice.

"I always have a way of taking my turn. Did you really think you were going to come off best in this little shuffle?"

"It isn't over yet!"

"No? Then you mean to make more trouble?"

"You will find out!"

"Now, what if I should take a notion to run you in?"

"I would be free to-morrow."

"On bail, eh?"

"Yes."

"You have friends, I know."

"I have."

"But I might make a serious charge against you."

"How serious?"

"Kidnapping."

"You couldn't prove it."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it. I might make a counter charge."

"What?"

"Kidnapping."

"Do you think you could prove that?"

"It would be true."

"But could you prove it?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By Irma."

"Ah! but you haven't Irma."

"I would make you produce her."

"Easier said than done. I am not in this game for fun, Booth. I will tell you now that I could wind up your career without delay, if I took the notion."

"Why don't you do so?"

"I have good reasons."

"What are they?"

"You know I have set out to break up the Tigers."

"A big job."

"You are one of them."

"You have only your own word to prove that."

"Don't be sure."

"But I am sure. I will tell you now, seeing we are having a spell of telling each other things, you will never succeed in your undertaking. Even if I should confess just now, that we are along together, that I am one of the Tigers, what would the confession amount to? Afterwards, I could swear I said nothing of the kind, and my word would be as good as yours."

"Do you dare acknowledge you are one of the Tenderloin Tigers?"

Broadway Bob hesitated.

"I thought so!" sneered Dan. "You have not nerve enough to confess it to me, even though we are alone. You say I am a private detective, and private detectives are under a ban in this town, believed to be rascals as great as the criminals. Their word under oath is doubted; and still you fear me so much you dare not be a man and acknowledge yourself chief of the Tenderloin Tigers."

"Do you think I fear you?"

"I know it."

"You are fooling yourself."

"Prove it."

"All right. I will tell you now that I am the chief of the Tenderloin Tigers! I throw my defiance boldly in your face! If you were not a private detective, you would know I stand in with a certain portion of the police, and it is utterly impossible to crush me. Why, some of your worst enemies are the men who wear buttons!"

"Perhaps you imagine you are telling me something I do not know. My dear sir, I quite understand what it is to have a pull with the police and the politicians of this big town. Still, there are honest men enough in New York City to support any one who has the nerve to fight police and political corruption."

"Bah! The honest men in this town are cowards! Especially is this true if they happen to have a little wealth. You might have been a rich man and retired by this time if you hadn't been so devilish honest. As it is, the Tigers are pretty sure to fit you for a pretty little lot in Greenwood."

"It may comfort you to think so."

"You may as well make your will."

"That is quite unnecessary. At any rate, you would not be mentioned in it."

"Well, you need not bother to mention your friend, Mr. Harold St. Clair. He will have no further need of earthly treasures."

"What do you mean?"

"Never mind."

"But I do mind. Have you harmed St. Clair?"

"That is for you to discover."

"If you have, I will—"

"You won't have any time. Dan Downing, the Tigers will put you out of the way within forty-eight hours! That is why I fear you so little. You will not live to work up any clues you may have."

This did not seem to disturb Dan.

"You are welcome to think so; but time will tell. Just now, you must confess I have the best of the game. Irma is beyond your reach."

"I shall immediately inform the police where to look for her."

"You will do nothing of the kind."

"Why not?"

"If you do, I will have you pulled and turn over every scrap of evidence I have against you. I will make it so hot for you you will wish yourself in sheol for a change! This is business, Booth!"

The Rounder pretended to hold Dan's words in disdain, but it was plain they had affected him. The detective added:

"I will tell you what I can prove, although you have said I could not. I can prove you are

the chief of the Tenderloin Tigers. I have the evidence."

"You lie!"

"It may make you feel better to think so. I have been carrying around a present gotten up especially for your benefit. Reckon I will give it to you now."

The Double-voice Detective made a sudden move and—*click, click*—Broadway Bob felt his wrists encircled by irons!

"Do you mean to run me in?" he asked, with forced calmness.

"Not now, Robert. I give you these as a warning. There is a little motto engraven on them—something for you to read. I see we are getting well up-town, so I will have to leave you. Good-night, darling! Don't forget you love me more than all else in the wide world."

Without stopping the cab, Dan opened the door and sprung out. The Rounder immediately shouted to the driver, and then yelled to Game Gus:

"Stop him! That is Dan Downing! Stop him!"

But the ferret darted swiftly around a corner and vanished.

Two hours later Double-voice Dan was alone in a private room, and there was a smile of satisfaction on his face.

"This has been a royal night's work!" he muttered. "I am making good progress now."

He unbuttoned his coat and took out something that, like a detective camera, had projected a kind of flaring "mouthpiece" through a buttonhole. It was a tiny cylinder he had been able to set revolving by means of a spring. The cylinder was hidden in a small square box-like arrangement. Taking the cylinder from the box, he examined it closely, his eyes gleaming. At length, he spoke, triumph expressed in his voice:

"This talking cylinder," cried Double-voice Dan, "bears the evidence that will convict the chief of the Tenderloin Tigers!"

In fact, the small roll was a portion of a tiny Edison phonograph he had worn concealed beneath his coat. His plans had worked to perfection, for, while in the cab, he had angered Broadway Bob into saying many indiscreet things. The Rounder had confessed himself the chief of Tigers, and the phonograph had recorded his words!

The craft of the Go-It-Alone Detective, like his courage, was limitless.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH!"

THE fury of Broadway Bob when he thought over all that had happened was something terrible.

"Furies take that infernal bloodhound!" he grated, as he twisted at the handcuffs on his wrists. "Isn't this the fiend's own trick—to put the irons on a fellow and then leave him to get them off as best he can!"

Game Gus was with him, and the cab-driver had been instructed to take them to a certain number on Third avenue.

"Never mind, old fellow," said the sport, by way of consolation, although it almost seemed there was a touch of scorn in his voice. "We will soon be with Nason, and he will knock those irons off in short order."

"That's not it!" flashed the Rounder. "To think that whelp of a detective should get the best of me by such a trick after the game was right in my hands. That's what makes my blood boil!"

"The game is not ended."

"Right!"

"You may hold best cards on the new deal."

"That's just what I will! There is to be no more fooling—no more delays! Dan Downing must be put out of the way as speedily as possible! He knows altogether too much, and by heaven! I fear he will take a notion to use his knowledge! It is the first time in all my life I ever really experienced fear of any living mortal; but I'm hanged if this creature seems like a mortal!"

"Still we know he is."

"It is simply marvelous how he gets around. Why, Gus! that fellow was away out in Jersey just before I turned up at the old house! He was following me, disguised as an old farmer from Hohokus. I twigged his little racket and made for him with a sticker."

"But didn't stick him?"

"No," confessed Bob, hesitating to tell the truth. And then he added: "The slippery imp jumped out of the window of the bar-room where we were and got away in the darkness."

"Made a sneak?"

"Yes. I expected he would follow me further, but he did not seem to do so. I suppose he turned back to Jersey City, and that was how he happened to be on hand when we appeared."

"What are you going to do about Miss Webster?"

"Don't ask me; I haven't a plan. I must think that over. She is where she will not be harmed, to say the least. If we can down the detective, I do not fancy it will be so hard getting track of her. I have a power that may lead her to me, for all of her would-be friends."

In a short time the cab halted at the number on third avenue. Gus got out first.

"Coast is clear," he announced, after looking around.

The driver was told to wait, and Bob alighted. Then the two rascals hurried into a dark doorway, where a bell was promptly rung.

They were forced to ring several times before a voice came down the tube, asking who was there and what was wanted at that time of the night.

Bob made reply, and, with a click, the door opened. Then they passed into the hallway and stumbled up the stairs.

At the head of the first flight were some rooms over a little shop kept by Fenwick Nason, a professed locksmith. At the door of these rooms they paused and rapped impatiently.

"In a minute," said a surly voice from beyond the door. "Give a man time to get his pants on, will you?"

In few minutes the door was opened, and a man with long hair, frowns beard and keen black eyes appeared, lamp in hand. One suspender had been thrown over a shoulder to support his pantaloons, but he had not paused to draw stockings on the feet which were thrust into an old pair of slippers.

"What in the name of all that is bad brings you here at this hour?" he surly demanded. "It cannot be far from three o'clock in the morning, and I have just found my way to bed and to sleep, when your infernal ringing awoke me."

"I propose to pay you for breaking your slumbers," asserted the Rounder.

"You always pay," bowed Nason, his manner suddenly becoming obsequious.

"That's dead right. I'm no beat, whatever else my foes may say of me."

"How can I serve you?"

Bob held up his manacled wrists.

"Whew!" whistled the frowzy-headed locksmith.

"I want those ornaments taken off in double-quick order," said Bob.

"I thought you were too sharp to get into any trouble with the police," ventured Nason.

"No matter what you thought!" sharply snapped the Rounder. "You don't know that I have been in trouble with the police. All you have to do is to take these things off and receive your money. Where are your tools?"

"In the shop below."

"Can't you bring them here?"

"It will better to go to the shop."

"How?"

"By the back way."

"All right. Lead on."

The locksmith did so, and his visitors followed. Down into the dusty and dingy little shop they went, and there, putting the bellows to work, he soon had a bright light in the forge that illumined the whole room brightly. By this light Nason examined the handcuffs.

"Neat bracelets these," he said, with admiration.

Bob uttered an impatient exclamation.

"You are wasting time, and my time is precious just now!"

"What is this inscription on them?"

"What is what?"

"There is some lettering here."

Then the manacled man remembered Dan Downing had said something about a warning on the handcuffs—had said there was something engraven there.

"Let me see!" he cried, as he held them nearer the light.

The lettering was plain enough, and the Rounder's face turned paler when he read the words on the manacles:

"The wages of sin is death!"

"Knock the accursed things off quick!" gasped the Rounder, with sudden emotion.

"They strangle me—strangle me!"

His agitation was apparent and painful. His face was paler than Game Gus had ever seen it before, and the sport saw the hands of his master tremble.

"Things are getting in a bad way when Bob loses his nerve," Gus told himself, and he was not far from right.

The locksmith went to work without delay. He knew how to make stroke and file tell, and it was not so very long before he had freed Broadway Bob of his unpleasant ornaments.

"What shall I do with them?" he asked.

"Anything you please," was the reply. "I never want to see them again! I breathe more freely now."

He gave Nason a ten-dollar bill; then they ascended to the rooms above by the back stairs. The locksmith let them out, and they found the cab waiting.

To their amazement, just as they were on the point of getting into the cab, a figure came quickly forward and a hand touched the Rounder's arm.

Bob wheeled with a snarl, his hand going back toward his hip pocket.

"What in blazes—"

He paused abruptly, for he saw who the man was.

Sleek, the Shadow, stood there!

"Where did you come from?"

"From all over. I have something to tell you."

"I am listening."

"D. D. has the girl."

"How do you know?"

"I saw her with him on Sixth avenue."

"Did you follow?"

"Of course I did, and he knocked me over for my trouble, curse him!"

"How long ago was this?"

"Only a short time."

"Didn't follow Downing after he struck you?"

"He said he'd blow the top of my head off if I did."

"That scared you out?"

"I think a great deal of my head. It wouldn't look well without a top."

"Sleek, you are a wretched coward, but you may still prove of some value. If you will find where he has taken that girl, I will put a hundred dollars extra money in your hands. If you will do that other little job I spoke of, you will find the five hundred waiting for you. Get about your work, and don't sleep over it."

Then Game Gus and the Rounder got into the cab, which rumbled away.

The sound of an Elevated train rumbling along overhead drowned the noise that came from Sleek's lips as he watched the retreating cab, but, from the expression of his face, a casual observer would have sworn he was laughing.

It was nearly an hour after this that Dan Downing, in the seclusion of a private room, examined the talking cylinder which held such fearful evidence against Broadway Bob!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SELTZER AGAINST STEEL.

WHEN Robert Booth was alone, he fell to thinking it all over, and he fully realized what a fearful foe Dan Downing was. He also began to have some doubts about his wisdom in having anything to do with Sleek, the bogus detective.

"That creature is getting to know too much!" he muttered. "I don't like it. The rascal is not anybody's fool, and he may take a notion to turn. Of course he could not prove I offered him money to put Downing out of the way, but these stories would tell against me. It would have been better for me had the treacherous snide failed to escape from the burning building. That would have put him out of the way."

He paced up and down his room, his forehead knotted and a deadly light in his dark eyes.

"One dog is out of my path!" he finally cried. "Harold St. Clair will not cause me more trouble. Downing must follow him, and that right soon! With the implacable detective disposed of, it would be pretty plain sailing. My mysterious power would conquer everything else."

"I went into this thing for money in the first place, but I really begin to fancy I want to possess that fair girl. I have taken great pains to get Webster foul. It was only by means of my secret power that I obtained possession of the photographs of that forged note. Game Gus helped me out by acting as Frank Wallace and trying to force the old man to come down, but Webster engaged Downing to get after Wallace when he showed up again. As a result, nothing more has been seen of Wallace up to date."

"But I am not to be baffled. The moment I see my way open to push matters again, I will do so. The Tigers are with me to the last one, but they do not dream I am simply using them as tools. They are aroused against this infernal detective, because he has started in to break them up, and so they stand ready to do anything that brings safety to them and dismay to him."

The morning light was creeping over the roofs and stealing in at his window when he flung himself on his bed without undressing and fell into a troubled slumber.

Rascal though he was, it was an unusual thing for Broadway Bob to be troubled with dreams. Now, however, he tossed and moaned and even uttered curses through his clenched teeth, while there was a look of fear and pain on his handsome face.

The strain was beginning to tell upon him.

Through his dreams he was pursued by a fiend with flaming eyes and iron hands. The name of the fiend was chiseled on his forehead, and he knew it was Dan Downing. If those iron hands closed upon him, he would be dragged to a dungeon—to the gallows! Like a hunted animal he fled on and on, now and then pausing to hide in some dark spot, where he would remain until he saw those iron hands creeping slowly and surely in upon him—until the gleam of those terrible eyes pierced the darkness and made his place of concealment no longer available.

For a while, he dreamed of Irma. He thought she was at his side, dressed all in white, about to become his bride. She shrunk from him and feared him, but he held her silent and passive with his strange power. There were many guests, but they all thought her willing to become the wife of the handsome man at her side. They knew nothing of the mystic power that froze her tongue when she would utter her own thoughts and compelled her to speak the thoughts of another.

The ceremony was being spoken. She would soon be his.

Suddenly the lights faded and the guests melted away. He was alone—alone with Irma. She was still there, for he could see her white dress in the darkness. He would have embraced her, but her hands clutched his wrists and prevented. How cold and hard those hands were! They crept up his arms—up and up, while the figure in white gradually changed. He felt the hands at his throat, and he knew they were of iron. Then the demon eyes burned into his soul, the cold, metallic fingers closed on his throat, and he felt himself being strangled to death.

"I know you!" he groaned, fighting to tear the hands from his neck. "You are that devil called Dan Downing!"

Then he awoke, and he was covered from head to feet with cold perspiration, his blood seeming frozen in his veins, even though the warm sunlight streaming in at the window fell full on the bed where he lay.

Shaken and unnerved, he arose and looked into the mirror. He was horrified at the haggard features he saw there. It seemed that in a few short hours he had aged years.

"Is it possible Dan Downing is going to break me down and be triumphant?" he muttered, even his voice sounding unnatural. "No, no, no! I will not have it so! I haven't been using myself right lately. All I need is a few drinks to brace me up."

It was the same old story. The unrelenting persistence of the Double-voice Detective and the impossibility of getting the better of him had crushed the nerve of many a famous criminal and brought them to justice.

Bob made his way to the nearest bar, as soon as he had left his room. There he stood up and turned down enough raw whisky to make an ordinary man drunk. The barkeeper looked at him in amazement.

"Whisky at this time of day!" he cried. "What have you been up to, Booth? Great Scott, man! you are turning the stuff into you as if it were water!"

The Rounder forced a smile and tried to make a careless motion with his hand.

"The wages of sin is death!"

Those words were ringing in his ears. He turned to see if some one had not spoken them, and then he bit his lip, knowing it was a freak of his disordered imagination.

He could not eat anything, and he started out to walk off his nervousness. His steps led him to the Bowery.

Suddenly he started, brushing his hand across his eyes. Dan Downing, the ubiquitous, was crossing the street a short distance ahead.

"Oh, you devil!" he growled, unmindful of being overheard. "How I would like to put a bullet through you!"

He followed Dan, taking care not to be detected. He felt sure the sleuth-shadower did not know he was being shadowed.

It was apparent business had brought Double-voice Dan to the Bowery, for he walked along briskly, as if he had a distant destination in view. Downing was not a man to waste any time in strolling around for pleasure.

Suddenly, Broadway Bob saw a low-browed, evil-looking man standing on a corner, scowling at the pedestrians who passed.

"That's my man!" he thought, as he swiftly made his way toward the tough. "I know him. He will cut a man's heart out for fifty dollars."

"Hey, Jake!" he growled.

The ruffian started.

"Wal, what cher want?" he snarled, showing his snaggy teeth. "This quarter is gittin' run all over with Johnnies in good clothes," and he glanced scornfully at Bob's immaculate attire.

"Look here; I know you, Jake."

"I don't know you."

"Yes, you do. I'm the man who saved you from being sent up for knocking Bandy Mike on the head. Tom Duke got me to use my pull in getting you out."

"An' you done it—I remember now. W'at kin I do fer you?"

"Do you want a hundred dollars?"

"Do I? I hain't had a feed sence day before yesterday, an' I was jest thinkin' how I could git at some cove's change."

"This is cutting. I will pull you through if you are pinched; but you must try to get out of the way. Are you in it?"

"For a hundred—sure."

"Come on."

It did not take Bob long to show Dan Downing to the tug. The Rounder was not only desperate, but he was losing his keen judgment. He thrust a roll of bills into the ruffian's hands, and Jigger Jake followed the detective into a low saloon.

Dan was standing at the bar in the act of drawing a glass of seltzer from a siphon bottle when fortune caused him to look in the mirror before him.

There he saw the reflection of a low-browed, murderous-eyed tough who was coming swiftly upon him, having a glittering knife uplifted.

Quick as thought, Double-voice Dan wheeled

and pressed open the valve of the siphon bottle, squirting a stream of seltzer into the face and eyes of the paid assassin.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DAN TAKES THE PILL.

THE detective's means of defense was certainly unexpected and novel, therefore it was most effective. The force of the seltzer fairly made the thug stagger, and before he could recover himself, Dan Downing was upon him.

Spat!

The blow was a terrific one, and Dan's hard fist caught Jigger Jake fairly on the point of the jaw, lifting the desperado from his feet and sending him headlong under a table, knocked senseless.

Having thus disposed of his adversary, the ferret turned back to the bar, drew the last of the seltzer from the bottle into a glass, drank the liquid, and then settled for the whole bottle.

The frequenters of the saloon seemed somewhat dazed by what had occurred, but the coolness of the man won their admiration until some one whispered that he was Double-voice Dan Downing.

"Jake was tryin' to settle an old score, most likely," remarked one of the witnesses.

The sentiment toward Dan seemed to change, and the men who were on hand pulled the unconscious ruffian from beneath the table, while they scowled blackly at the detective.

Dan knew what had occurred had spoiled the success of his visit to the Bowery by attracting attention to him, and so, without haste, he calmly walked out of the saloon.

Broadway Bob was lingering in the vicinity, and a curse fell from his lips when he saw the invincible Dan come sauntering quietly out. He did not know what had happened, but fancied that Jigger Jake had betrayed him, making no attempt to earn the money already in his possession.

"The end is not yet!" grated the Rounder, as he started to follow Dan once more.

He was seized by a fierce longing to make an attempt on the detective's life himself. He thought how easily he could steal up behind him and send a bullet into his back from such short range that failure in his purpose would be impossible.

But, fortunately, his madness had not reached the point that led him to utter and unreasoning abandon. He knew he could not escape arrest and sure punishment if he did such a thing, and he held himself in check.

He now realized his folly in inducing Jigger Jake to make an attempt on the ferret's life, for, had the thug killed Dan, a thorough investigation of the murder would have followed, and Broadway Bob must have been entangled.

"The place was too public," he thought. "It is probable even the nerve of the tough failed him when he saw how he could not escape after he had cut Double-voice Dan down."

Suddenly Dan darted in at a little side door and disappeared.

Bob hurried forward to the door and looked up a flight of stairs.

"Wonder what he has gone up there for?" he muttered. "I will wait near until he comes out."

Within a minute, Sleek the Shadow came out of that very door!

Bob hurried forward and intercepted him.

"Did you see Downing?" anxiously asked the Rounder.

The bogus detective looked dazed for a moment, then asked:

"Where?"

"Up there. He went up the stairs."

Sleek shook his head.

"Didn't see him."

"Then he must be up there somewhere now. Is there any other way out?"

"Only these stairs."

"Then we must watch for him to appear."

They watched in vain for nearly an hour; then the Rounder said:

"You stay here and get after him the moment he appears, if he does appear."

"Where are you going?"

"To see if I can find him up there."

Up the stairs went Broadway Bob. He was gone at least fifteen minutes, and Sleek was waiting when he returned.

"Did you find him?" eagerly asked the Shadow.

"Not a trace," was the reply. "Has he come out?"

The Grand street shark shook his head.

Then the Rounder burst into a torrent of fierce words.

"The devil has again given me the slip!" he raved. "It does not seem possible to keep track of him! He knows every crook and turn of New York, and can vanish in the most remarkable manner."

To this Sleek fully agreed.

"The end is not yet! the end is not yet!" Booth kept repeating savagely. "The fight is only fairly begun!"

The Shadow Sneak kept at his side, and they hurried up-town. Bob seemed to find it necessary to walk swiftly to work off his anger.

Finally, they crossed over to Broadway and

took a car. Sleek asked no questions, but seemed determined to stick close to his master.

At Thirty-third street they left the car and turned east, soon finding themselves on Madison avenue.

Then, for the first time since leaving the Bowery, Broadway Bob seemed to realize that Sleek was with him.

"So you came along," he said. "Well, I don't know as I have any use for you up here. I am going to make a call. If you will wait outside—"

"Oh, certainly, certainly!" bowed the bogus detective. "I will wait for you."

"Then wait here on this corner."

Bob went on, while the Shadow stood on the corner and watched until his employer ran lightly up some steps and pulled at a bell-knob.

The house was that of Calvin Webster.

A servant soon appeared, and the Rounder was readily admitted.

"Mr. Webster is in the library," said the servant.

Bob went directly there, as if he were familiar with the place, and was a favored person which he seemed to the servants. He did not even pause to rap on the door, but entered with a boldness that was astonishing.

Calvin Webster was sitting in an easy-chair, a strange, sad look on his face. He started up at the unceremonious intrusion of his visitor, but sunk back when he saw who it was.

"Booth—you?"

"Yes, I," nodded the Rounder, quite coolly.

The broker's face flushed at the familiar, not to say insolent, manner of his visitor.

"What word do you bring concerning Irma?" he asked, repressing his feelings.

"Why should you ask me about her?"

"Why should I? Why shouldn't I?"

"I presume she is safe with your chosen pups."

"Sir, this is insulting!" and the broker started to his feet. "I do not understand your language, and I will not endure it!"

Broadway Bob sunk into an easy-chair, selecting a cigar from a silver holder on the table and giving a careless wave of his hand.

"Don't mount your high horse, Webster!" he advised. "I know the whole gag from start to finish."

Then he leisurely lighted the cigar.

Calvin Webster's rage was with difficulty held in check.

"What do you mean by coming into my house in such a manner and using such language?" he demanded.

"Sit down, man, sit down!" returned Bob, shooting a glance at the other—a glance which caused Webster to suddenly drop into a chair.

"That is better. You make me uneasy when you stand up and glare at me in that glowering fashion."

The broker opened his lips to make a retort, but suddenly closed them.

"I will tell you what I mean," said the Rounder, blowing a perfect ring of milky-blue smoke from his mouth. "I now understand your little trick. I understand why you have not been more aroused over the kidnapping of your daughter."

"Well?"

"You knew the kidnapping was going to take place before it occurred?"

"I—I—"

"Don't lie, Webster!"

"Sir!"

Broadway Bob did not even glance at the man he had insulted, but he made a peculiar motion with his hands.

"You should have known better than to have attempted to fool me, Calvin Webster," he said.

"You might have imagined I would not take kindly to it when I tumbled to the truth, which could not be so very long."

"I—I don't know what you are driving at," feebly asserted the broker.

"Yes you do!" firmly returned Booth. "You know you entered into a compact with that infernal shark who calls himself a detective, Dan Downing, and by that agreement he snatched your daughter from my side just as she was about to become my wife! Don't deny it!"

Mr. Webster arose to his feet again.

"I have no intention of denying it," he slowly said. "It is all quite true. I sought this man to give my child the protection I could not give her. I never willingly gave my consent to her marriage with you, for I believe you to be a scoundrel! I know not what devilish power it is that comes over me at times and makes me anything but myself. When those spells are on me, I appear like your friend. Another will than my own governs me. I feared the spell that would cause me to give my child into your care, and I made the compact with Double-voice Dan. He was delayed until the last minute in carrying out his plan of taking my child away, but he succeeded just in the nick of time. She is safe with him."

"Think you so? Well, then, let me tell you a little something: For the past three days she has been with me! I took her from Downing and carried her away out into Jersey. Your wonderful ally did not prove so efficacious as you imagined him. Ha! ha! ha!"

"I do not believe you speak the truth!"

"You are not compelled to do so."

The Rounder seemed utterly indifferent.

Calvin Webster started to pace up and down the room but Bob looked at him and commanded him to sit down. For a moment, the broker seemed struggling against a will stronger than his own; then he succumbed, sinking into his chair once more.

"Now be sensible," advised the diabolical rascal. "I am in no mood for fooling. I have come here on business."

"What business?"

"I want that money."

"What money?"

"The money I asked you for."

"I don't remember anything about it."

The Rounder arose and went over to Webster, taking the cigar from his lips.

"Look at me!" he commanded.

The broker did so, and for some seconds the two men gazed into each other's eyes. Gradually the expression on Calvin Webster's features changed and a hazy look came into his eyes. At length, Broadway Bob stepped back a pace and looked at the man, a triumphant laugh breaking from his lips.

"My power over this man is now complete!" he muttered. "Had I know my ability to control him some time ago, there would have been no need to call the assistance of any one else. I need not have bothered me about the forged check or forced the truth from the lips of Red Madge."

Then he turned to his victim.

"Produce that money!" he ordered, imperatively.

Mechanically Webster arose and walked across the room to a tiny desk, from which he took a package of bank bills. These he brought to Bob, placing them on the table.

"Is this the exact sum?" asked the triumphant scoundrel, his eyes gleaming with satisfaction.

"It is," was the low reply.

"Even five thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"Good! It is just what I need."

"It is just what you won't get!"

A hand reached under Robert Booth's arm and snatched the package of bills.

With a startled cry, the astounded Rounder wheeled and found himself face to face with Dan Downing!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DETECTIVE'S TERRIBLE DOOM.

ASTONISHED beyond measure, the villain fell back a pace, his face blanching.

Double-voice Dan coolly pocketed the roll of bills.

The parted portieres told how he had entered the room. The servant in the kitchen could have told how he entered the house by the back way.

"I see I happened along just in time," the detective remarked.

"How in blazes did you manage to get here?" asked Bob.

"That is for you to find out. I am here; let it go at that."

"Hand over that money!"

Dan smiled.

"Will you have it now, or wait until you get it?" he blandly inquired.

"It is mine! Hand it over, or I'll—"

"What?"

They glared into each other's eyes. Suddenly Broadway Bob brought all his hypnotic power to play on the detective. Dan laughed in his face.

"It won't work, Robert. I have practiced it myself, and I am not a good subject for you to experiment on. Indeed, I can beat you at that very game!"

A snarl broke from the Rounder's lips.

"It must be you are in league with the Evil One!" he cried.

"I heard you say something like that once before, and the answer I made to you then holds good—I transact no business with your master."

"You have no right to that money."

"No more have you."

"It was given me by Mr. Webster."

"Pah! You forced him to give it up."

Bob turned to the broker.

"Webster, didn't you give me this money of your own free will?"

A mechanical "yes" was the reply.

"It was in payment of a debt, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, you have worked him for all you are worth," nodded Dan.

"Do you still deny my right to the money?"

"Of course I do. I was behind those curtains when you first asked him about it. He was in his right mind then, and he knew nothing of it. You threw him into this hypnotic state, and then compelled him to produce it."

"You lie!"

"Have a care, Booth! I am not here to play with you."

"Your theory is absurd. No one will believe it."

"It is quite possible it might be doubted, but that does not make it any the less true. This man, in his right mind, knows of your power"

over him and fears it. He has told me that. At some previous time, when you had thrown him into this condition of passivity, you ordered him to bring that package of bills to this room. He did so, but, in his right mind, he remembered nothing about them."

"That is all preposterous. The money was given me in payment of a debt, and I demand it!"

"What was the debt—how contracted?"

"None of your business!"

"Very well; you won't get the money."

"I will!"

Like a leaping tiger, Bob launched himself at the throat of the Double-voice Detective.

They grappled, and a fierce battle began.

It would have been swiftly ended, for Dan Downing was more than the Rounder's master, but, Bob saw he was to be overcome, and called to Calvin Webster:

"Here—help me handle this robber! Quick! Hit him on the head with something—anything that will knock him out!"

The broker seemed to hesitate, but Bob caught his eye and repeated the order.

Again he proved his marvelous power.

Webster caught up a heavy round paper weight that lay on the little table, and the next moment had struck Dan Downing a stunning blow on the head.

The great detective sunk down limply.

In an instant, Broadway Bob was kneeling on the prostrate form, his hands fastened on the terrible shadower's throat.

"Get me a rope of some kind, Webster," he ordered. "Be lively!"

And the spell-bound man obeyed, hastening from the room and quickly returning with a rope. Following the directions of the master mind, he aided Bob in binding and gagging the helpless ferret.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the villain, as he took the money from Dan's pocket and transferred it to his own. "This time I am chief! I have you now, and I do not mean to let you slip me again!"

Calvin Webster stood looking on, as if he took no real interest in what was occurring.

"Webster," said the Rounder, rising to his feet, "I want to take this man into the cellar. You must go out and see if the coast is clear. If any of the servants are about, send them away. Do you understand?"

The broker bowed.

"Go ahead!"

Webster left the room.

"If I get him safely into the cellar, I will fix him so he'll never leave this house!" declared Broadway Bob, as he stood looking down at the helpless man. "I have failed to put him out of the way several times, but there shall be no failure now. Calvin Webster will aid me. If Dan Downing disappears, no one will ever think of looking for his body in the cellar of Webster's Madison avenue residence."

He laughed to himself with fiendish satisfaction.

The broker soon returned.

"Is it all right?" asked the waiting villain.

"All right."

"Then take hold here and help me carry him into the cellar."

Webster obeyed, and they descended into the cellar without being seen by any one.

As they placed Downing on the cemented bottom of the cellar, he opened his eyes and looked at them.

"So you are conscious!" exclaimed Bob. "I am glad of it, for I want you to know how I have the best of you, after all, you infernal snake. I am going to kill you!"

There was no doubt but he really meant to carry out his deadly design. There was murder in his black eyes.

Dan could not reply, for the gag rendered him speechless, but there was no look of fear or appeal on his face.

"Perhaps you think I am fooling," added Booth. "If so, you will soon find out your mistake. I have brought you here into this cellar to put you out of my way forever. I will confess you have made me fear you, for you have scarcely seemed like a human being. You have appeared and vanished in the most remarkable ways, and it has not seemed possible to get at a vital spot in your make-up. You have withstood bullet and steel; but I have a severer test for you."

He paused to gloat over his victim.

"I know not what you have done with Irma," he finally went on; "but I will find a way of discovering. With the wondrous power I have discovered I possess I begin to believe I can do anything. That power has brought you here helpless at my feet. With you out of the way, New York shall be my kingdom!"

"There will be no danger that your fate will ever become known. Your body will not be found, for it shall disappear from the face of the earth!"

"Do you see that big furnace there? It is used for heating this entire house in cold weather. There is no fire in it now, but I am going to build one."

There was something horribly significant in his tone and manner.

He stepped to the furnace and threw open the big iron door. A low exclamation of satisfaction escaped from his lips, for he saw a lot of wood therein. Boxes that had been opened in the cellar during warm weather had been broken in pieces and thrown into the furnace to get them out of the way.

"All I need is some shavings," said Bob, and, looking around, he soon discovered some.

It took him but a short time to arrange the shavings. His hands were trembling somewhat, but there was no thought of mercy in his black heart.

When everything was ready, he turned to Dan again:

"It is probable you understand what I am going to do; I intend to start that fire and then chuck you in there to roast, you infernal detective-bound!"

There was the look of a fiend in his eyes.

Having ordered Calvin Webster to stand ready to help throw the defenseless captive into the furnace, Booth took out a silver match-safe and extracted a parlor match therefrom. Then he scratched the match and carefully lighted the shavings.

A tiny blaze sprung up.

"All ready; lift him!" commanded the relentless wretch.

Double-voice Dan was lifted from the cellar-bottom. Once, twice they swung him back and forth between them, and then Broadway Bob softly cried:

"In he goes!"

With all their strength they cast the helpless detective headlong into the furnace where the fire had been kindled!

Then Broadway Bob shut the iron door with a loud clang!

CHAPTER XXXI.

BROADWAY BOB TRIUMPHANT.

FOR a moment after casting Double-voice Dan into the furnace the two men stared into each other's eyes. Horror mingled with fiendish satisfaction was expressed on the countenance of the Rounder, while a dim understanding of the terrible truth seemed creeping over Calvin Webster.

Suddenly both men turned and hurried up the cellar stairs, leaving Dan Downing to be destroyed in the furnace.

What a horrible thing it was. Even Broadway Bob shuddered when he thought of it afterward.

But it was such a good way of disposing of the tireless bloodhound. The body would be utterly destroyed, and no traces of blood or shreds of clothing would be left behind to serve as a clue to the manner of his taking off.

Bob Booth's brutal heart was leaping with satisfaction, and he kept thinking over and over:

"He'll never trouble me again! he'll never trouble me again!"

They reached the library without being seen by a single servant, and there the Rounder turned on Calvin Webster.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"I—I don't know," faltered the broker, vaguely.

"That is right—you don't know—you must never know. I command you to forget forever what happened in the cellar just now! You are never to think of it again. Do you understand?"

"I do."

"Good."

He walked up and down the room to steady his nerves, but that did not seem to accomplish the desired purpose.

"Ring up a servant and order whisky, Webster," he commanded.

The broker obeyed, and the liquor was soon brought to them.

"Here's forgetfulness of the past and success in the future," muttered Bob, as he swallowed several brimming glasses.

The liquor had the desired effect, for the blood returned to his cheek and his nerves became steadier.

Glancing at his watch, he discovered it was time for lunch.

"And by Jove! I am hungry," he said:

Then he turned to Calvin Webster, adding: "Thirty minutes after I leave the house you will be yourself again. Still, you must remember nothing that took place in the cellar."

One minute later, he was on the street.

He walked with a swinging, springy step, and the perfect flush of health seemed in his cheeks. His eyes were bright and clear, and no trace of guilt had left its mark on his handsome face.

Again he seemed like the old-time Rounder.

He forgot to look for Sleek, the Shadow Steak, and the bogus detective did not appear.

Straight down to Delmonico's he made his way, and there he ordered a lunch that cost more than most working men earned in a week. He ate heartily of what he desired and nibbled at many dainty dishes for which he really cared little. And when he paid his score, the bill was taken from a package in which there was originally five thousand dollars.

When he was on the street once more, Bob told himself he had never felt better. On Broadway he nodded to many acquaintances, not a few of whom were recognized as belonging to the fashionable clique of the metropolis.

Something led him to Koster & Bial's saloon at the corner of Twenty-fourth street and Sixth avenue. There he descended to "Ye Olden Tavern"—so called—beneath the saloon and discovered Game Gus sitting all alone at one of the tables.

"Hello, Gus, old man!" called Bob. "How are you feeling this most magnificent day?"

He dropped into a seat at the gambler's side, and Game Gus looked at him critically.

"What's happened, Bob?" he asked.

"Why?"

"It can't be you have drank enough to get so gay. Something must have happened."

"You're right, pal—dead right! Waiter, cigars here."

"What's the cause of all this thushness?" urged the sport.

"We are dead in it!"

"What way?"

"Double-voice Dan has given up in disgust and retired from the game."

"You don't mean that?"

"He has retired."

"Bob, you are deceiving yourself. If Dan Downing has given the impression he has retired, take my word it is all a trick."

"Not much."

"I know him too well."

"He didn't have anything to say about retiring, but he has retired just the same. You won't ever see anything of him again."

Gus looked at his companion searchingly.

"I don't know as I fully understand you," he confessed. "Give us a square open deal and let me in on the ground floor. What has become of Downing?"

"He's gone."

"Where?"

"Straight to the hot place!"

"Tell me everything."

"I have told you enough, my dear boy. If I did not trust you thoroughly, I would not have told you so much. Don't forget what I say: Downing will trouble us no more. I do not usually talk through my hat, and I know what I am saying just now."

Just then they were interrupted by a rather tough-looking character who came strolling in and made straight for Bob. The man looked "rocky," to say the least and had a patch over his left eye.

"I knows you," he declared to the Rounder. "Yer helped me out one time. I'm dead down on me luck now. Gimme der price of 'a drink an' I'll give yer dis tract wot a Salvation Army chap chucked inter me ban' outside der door."

"Here you are," said Bob, giving him a dollar. "I don't want your old tract."

But the fellow insisted on leaving the tract, hurrying away with the money he had received.

After they had conversed a while longer Bob picked up the pamphlet and looked at the heading, which was printed in large black letters. In a moment he leaped to his feet, dashing the tract down on the table with an expression of mingled rage and horror.

The heading of the tract read:

"The wages of sin is death!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

HAUNTED.

"WHAT is the matter with you, man?" asked Game Gus, in astonishment, as Bob continued to rave. "You act like a lunatic!"

"Read that!" cried the Rounder, pointing at the ominous words.

"Well, what of it?" demanded the sport, after he had glanced at the printed words. "I don't see anything in that to stir you up this way."

"Have you forgotten those were the very words on those bracelets that cursed detective—"

The Rounder paused suddenly and glanced around, realizing he had drawn the attention of every one within the place to himself. His face, which had been pale, flushed somewhat, and he forced a laugh.

"I guess I have been drinking too much," he said, loud enough for the spectators to hear. "I must have some fresh air. Come on."

The gambler followed Bob from the place.

"You must be on the verge of getting looney, pal," said the sport.

"It is not that," assured Bob. "But those words—they seem to haunt me!"

"All imagination!"

"Possibly; but I don't like it. I would like to see the fellow who dropped that tract there."

Game Gus did his best to rid his comrade of what he considered a silly notion, and Bob was actually laughing at his own folly when they parted.

However, the Rounder was not in nearly as high spirits as he had been. The effect of the simple occurrence had been depressing, to say the least, and something like the haggard look and haunted light of a short time before had returned to his face and eyes.

He made his way directly to his apartments in one of the fashionable hotels.

A large accumulation of mail was waiting for him, much to his astonishment.

"Wonder who in the world all these letters can be from?" he muttered, as he glanced them over.

The chirography on every envelope was different, some being scrawling, some precise, some dainty and feminine and some coarse and decidedly masculine.

Bob tore open one and drew forth a sheet of paper.

Six words were written on it.

"The wages of sin is death!"

For some time he sat staring at those ominous words, the lines in his face growing deeper.

"Well," he finally said, "the joke is being kept up in great style!"

He opened another letter and read the same six words.

One after another, he opened every letter of the entire lot, finding every one contained that one startling sentence.

"I would like to get my hands on the author of this!" he grimly exclaimed.

And then he suddenly thought:

"The author! Great Heaven! This is a quotation from the Bible, and Double-voice Dan was the first to spring it on me. This must have been his work. If so, it was his last, for he is now where he is receiving the full benefit of the wages here spoken of."

He gathered the letters and carefully did them up in a bundle. Then he rung up a servant and requested that the bundle be burned without delay.

Having disposed of the odious letters, he breathed easier. Lighting a cigar, he walked to his window, which looked down on Broadway.

Bob was possessed of a decidedly keen pair of eyes, and he immediately noticed the figure of a man who seemed to be lounging opposite the hotel. There was something familiar about the figure, and he soon recognized in the lounge the tough who wore the patch over his eye and had given him the tract.

"By Moses! I'll have a closer look at that fellow!" he cried, catching up his hat and darting across the room.

He rung the elevator bell frantically and was soon being carried swiftly down to the ground. The moment he could get out of the elevator, he rushed out on the street and looked for the man with the patch.

He had disappeared!

Bob spent thirty minutes in useless search for the unknown, then returned in disgust to the hotel. With a slight shock of dismay, he discovered that, in his haste, he had left the door of his room unlocked.

"I don't fancy any one has been here," he muttered; "but it was a careless trick."

Something led him to the window again, and, to his unutterable amazement and disgust, the first figure he saw was that of the man with the patch, who was lounging in almost exactly the same spot opposite the hotel.

"Hang you!" he snarled. "I will pin you this time!"

Again he hastened down to the street, taking care to lock his door this time.

Once more he was unsuccessful, for the one he sought was not to be found.

"I don't like this!" he acknowledged to himself, as he returned to his room. "I wonder if it is all a trick of my eyesight—an optical illusion? If so, I must be breaking down."

The first thing he did on reaching his room was to hasten to the window and look down.

He nearly collapsed.

The man with the patch was in his position on the opposite side of the street!

"There is something more than chance in this!" he muttered, as he fell back and dropped into a chair. "It unnerves me!"

"The wages of sin is death!"

He started and looked around.

"Who spoke?" he cried.

There was a wild glare in his eyes as he stared into every corner. His lips had lost their color, and his naturally plump cheeks seemed sunken.

"Bah!" he snarled. "It was fancy!"

And then he seemed to hear strange whisperings in the air all around the room. On every side those terrible words were repeated over and over. He leaped to his feet and put his hands over his ears, while he looked for the lips which were whispering that fearful sentence.

"By the living gods!" he suddenly shouted; "if any one has entered my room and is playing this trick on me, he shall suffer!"

He snatched out a revolver and sought every place of concealment about his apartments. There was but one which could possibly have hidden a man effectively, and that was a small wardrobe.

He looked there, but discovered no living thing.

Still the terrible and mysterious whispering continued!

Unable to endure it any longer, he rushed madly from the room.

A few seconds later, a man appeared from

behind a long mackintosh that hung in the little wardrobe and also hastened out of the apartment.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHAT BOB FOUND IN THE FURNACE.

It was immediately noticed by the friends of the Rounder that he took to drinking an astonishing amount of liquor, although he never became intoxicated. The fiery poison did not seem to affect him at all, save to send a flush to his cheeks and make his sometimes unsteady hand a trifle firmer.

He was continually restless and unsettled, and he had a strange manner of wheeling with remarkable swiftness and glaring around at every one. At times, his black eyes gleamed with a fire that was not pleasant to see.

These odd actions set those who knew him to speculating on the cause, and, by many, it was agreed that the loss of his intended bride had broken down Bob in a measure. He was overwhelmed with consolation.

The disappearance of Irma Webster remained a mystery, and the police seemed no nearer reaching the truth than when they announced they were "hot on the trail," without really having a clue to work on.

Repeatedly did the Rounder urge Sleek, the Shadow Sneak, to do his best to find some trace of the broker's daughter, but the bogus detective did not seem able to do so. Had Bob known the truth, he would have found Sleek was busy shadowing him the most of the time.

But it was not Sleek who caused the villain the most annoyance. On numerous occasions Bob saw the man with the patch over his eye lingering about or following him stealthily along the streets.

These discoveries angered the Rounder, and he made several attempts to get hold of the strange man, but the unknown would disappear in the most unaccountable manner.

At last, Bob began to doubt the evidence of his eyes, and he asked many of his friends if they saw the man, carefully pointing him out. Once he called on the police to arrest the fellow, declaring he had made an attempt at robbery; but even the officers were unable to get their hand on the mysterious individual.

Booth grew to fear the unknown.

The haunted rascal longed to inspect the furnace in Calvin Webster's cellar, and, naturally, he would have had nerve enough to do such a thing; but within a few days all his old boldness had been sorely shaken.

He finally forced himself to visit the broker.

Again he found Webster in the library, and the broker started to his feet with a cry of nervous surprise when the visitor walked unceremoniously in upon him.

"Keep your seat, Webster," said Bob, with an attempt at his usual insulting freedom. "I know you are delighted to see me, but you needn't rise."

The broker stood with a hand on the back of the chair, a look of mingled horror and fear in his eyes.

"Delighted to see you," he slowly repeated, as if echoing the Rounder's words. And then he suddenly cried:

"I had rather see the devil!"

"Well, that is complimentary!" grinned Bob. "However, my skin is thick, and I can stand it."

"What do you want?"

"Are you in such a hurry to find out?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I would have you state your desire as quickly as possible, and then depart."

"You don't say! Well now, I am liable to stay quite a little bit."

The Rounder sat down in an easy-chair, assuming his usual arrogant familiarity, as he made a careless motion with one hand.

"Sit down, I tell you, Webster."

"I will not!"

Bob lifted his eyebrows in surprise.

"Rebelling, eh?"

"It is high time!"

"Sit down!"

The broker closed his lips firmly and remained standing.

"Sit down!"

Bob did not speak very loudly, but he turned the glare of his midnight eyes on the man and there was a certain commanding intonation in his voice that seemed effective, for Calvin Webster slowly sunk into the chair.

"All right," nodded the rascal. "I thought you would come to time. Now, we are like two old chums—two pals, eh?"

Webster shuddered.

"You don't like that word?" Bob went on. "Still, it is very applicable. We are pals, although you may not know it now. You aided me in doing the slickest job of my life."

The broker stared stonily, but said nothing.

"I suppose you don't remember that job?"

"No."

"I thought not," smiled the villain, and there was a vile look on his usually handsome face. "I didn't want you to remember."

The older man moved restlessly in his chair.

All at once Broadway Bob turned and stared hard at the broker. Webster lowered his eyes and seemed to be trying to avoid that gaze, but he was not successful, for in a few seconds, he was looking straight at the Rounder.

For a little time they sat thus, like two graven images, and then the master mind was completely the victor.

"Get up," ordered Bob.

Webster arose.

"You cannot sit down again."

The broker tried to sit in the chair, but was unable to do so.

"Do you see this cat I have here?" asked Booth, picking up a book from the table.

The other nodded.

"Take her," and the book changed hands.

"Look out that she does not scratch you." A sudden cry of pain broke from the broker's lips and he dropped the book.

"What's the matter?" demanded Bob.

"The cat scratched! See how she lacerated my hand! See how it bleeds!"

Bob was satisfied, and he picked up the book, replacing it on the table.

"Never mind a little scratch like that," he said. "You may sit down now. That is right. I want to ask you some questions. Where is Dan Downing?"

"I do not know."

"Is he dead or alive?"

"I cannot tell, but—but—"

"But what?"

"It seems as if he is dead."

"It seems so?"

"Yes."

"You would not take oath to his death?"

"No."

"Are you sure you do not know how he died?"

"I don't think I know."

"Well, aren't you sure you do not know?"

"Yes, I am sure."

"If any one else should ask you, you would tell them you did not know?"

"I would."

"That is right; be sure to tell them you know nothing about it."

There was a look of absolute satisfaction on the Rounder's face, and he muttered:

"Even if he were thrown into a hypnotic trance by some other person, he could not tell them of Dan Downing's death, because I bade him forget it."

The secret of Broadway Bob's power over Calvin Wilson and his daughter was that the villain was a hypnotist. He had not practiced the Satanic art for years and had almost forgotten he possessed it until recently. When he discovered the struggle for Irma Webster's hand was going against him, he tried his power on her father.

Calvin Webster proved a good subject.

The first time Bob succeeded in getting complete control of the broker was the day Webster ordered Harold St. Clair from the house. At that moment Calvin Webster was completely under the control of the Rounder, and he did exactly what Broadway Bob had directed.

Elated at his success, the Rounder tried his art on Irma, and in her he found another subject. That really made him in command of the situation.

Harold St. Clair did see Irma Webster in Central Park with Robert Booth, but the girl was in a hypnotic trance at the time, and she afterward remembered nothing of the occurrence. That was why she so firmly declared she had not been driving with Bob. After being released from those hypnotic trances, neither father nor daughter could tell anything that occurred while they were under the influence of the master rascal.

Being informed concerning what he had done, Webster came to understand he was completely at the mercy of a conscienceless scoundrel, but he was at a loss for some means of escape.

Having resolved to lose no time, Bob caused the father to give out that Irma was to be married, and a certain number of invitations were sent around. All the conventional rules were broken, and the rather swell society who recognized the Websters were somewhat scandalized by the irregularity of the affair. Robert Booth cared nothing for this, if he could only accomplish his evil aims and finally obtain possession of Calvin Webster's daughter and fortune. However much he cared for Irma, it was the broker's wealth he mainly sought.

When Bob saw things coming his way so completely, he regretted he had enlisted the Tigers in the attempt to pluck the broker, for he knew the spoils would have to be divided. Still, he fancied the Tigers would prove of some use, for they could be easily induced to turn their attention entirely to putting Dan Downing, whom they hated and feared, out of the way.

In the end, however, he had been forced to dispose of the detective himself, and he felt that he had done the job most effectively. The body was destroyed, and his power over Webster made it true, as he believed, that no man living could testify against him.

Was the body destroyed?

The question startled him.

Had there been enough wood in the furnace

to effectually consume the body of the detective?

His nerve had returned to him in a measure, and he decided to investigate.

"Webster, lead the way to the cellar."

The broker obeyed.

In a few moments they were standing before the great furnace, Broadway Bob having brought a lighted lamp. For a brief space of time he hesitated, then he passed the light to Webster for him to hold.

Lifting the iron catch, Bob pulled open the door.

"Hold the light lower."

The broker obeyed, and Bob gazed into the furnace.

Only a mass of ashes greeted his gaze.

He took an iron rake and poked in the ashes, soon discovering something which he grasped and held up to view.

It was a large bone!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE LOST IS FOUND.

WITH a gasping cry of horror, Broadway Bob flung the bone back into the ashes of the furnace, hastily closing the door.

"There is nothing left but his bones!" he muttered, as he straightened up. "The fire has done its work faithfully. No one will think of looking there for a man's bones. I am safe!"

Then he ordered Calvin Webster to lead the way from the cellar, and they were soon in the library once more.

Bob breathed with greater freedom.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, as he paced the room.

"I am the king-pin now!"

Then he suddenly paused.

"Where is Irma?"

He asked himself the question, fully realizing the fate of the fair girl was unknown to him.

"There is one streak of luck that still holds against me," he thought. "I know not what Dan Downing did with her. She must be found, and that right soon."

Suddenly an idea struck him, and he turned to look at Calvin Webster.

"Is it not possible to make him tell me how to find her?" he murmured. "Such things have been done with hypnotic subjects. They have been known to reveal the hiding-place of buried treasure, or to tell where rich mines were located. Why shouldn't Calvin Webster tell me how to find his daughter? There is a bond of sympathy between them that should make such a thing possible. I will try."

"Webster?"

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to do a little searching for me."

"All right, sir."

"I want you to find your daughter, Irma."

"It is not necessary to search."

Bob started forward.

"Not necessary to search?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I know where she is!"

"The blazes you do!"

"It is true."

"Is it far?"

"Not very."

"How far?"

"Two flights of stairs!"

The Rounder fell back and caught a chair.

"Do you mean to say she is in this house?" he finally asked, speaking slowly.

Webster bowed.

"I do."

"How long has she been here?"

"For several days."

"And I have been searching New York high and low for her!" fumed the astounded man.

"All this time has been wasted! Hanged if I haven't half a mind to—" He advanced on the broker with clinched fists, but suddenly paused.

"No; I can't strike him while he is in this condition. But I will see Irma at once."

Then he ordered Webster to lead the way to the room where his daughter was.

Up the stairs they went, finally pausing before a door on which the broker rapped.

"Who's there?" asked a musical voice from the room—a voice that caused Broadway Bob's blood to leap more swiftly in his veins.

"It is I," answered Webster.

Immediately the door was opened, and Broadway Bob was the first to step into the room.

Irma was there. She fell back with a cry of dismay and fear, on seeing the Rounder.

"Good-evening, Miss Webster," bowed Bob, a cool, triumphant smile on his face. "I know you were not expecting me, but you must be pleased to see your affianced husband."

That the sight of him inspired her with the greatest terror was plainly apparent, for she covered her face with her hands, swaying a bit unsteadily and shrinking still further away.

"You?" she whispered, huskily; "you have found me!"

"Thanks to nobody, I have. You were hiding from me in your father's own house?"

"Yes."

"How foolish that was! Why, when you

were taken from me by that infernal detective I was bringing you here."

She suddenly tried to dart past him and escape, but he caught her arm.

"None of that!" he savagely snapped.

She uttered a scream of fear.

"Shut up!" was his brutal order. "You will arouse the servants!"

"Take your vile hands from my wrists!" she suddenly commanded, all the spirit in her passionate body aroused.

The rascal laughed.

"Do you actually think you can make me obey? I fancied you knew better by this time. I am master."

She turned to her father.

"Help me, father!" she appealed. "Make this human monster let me alone!"

Webster seemed struggling with himself, but Broadway Bob quickly settled the struggle by saying:

"You will not interfere, Calvin Webster."

The parent was unable to lift a hand in his child's behalf, no matter how much he desired to do so.

Then the Rounder forced Irma to look into his burning eyes. She struggled against his will, but the struggle was no more effective than that of a bird being charmed by a serpent. In a short time she was completely beneath his control.

"Now, my dear," said the villain, suavely, "you are going to leave the house with me. I will not take you far, but, by the living gods! I am going to have the credit of rescuing you from your kidnappers! The story shall be printed in all the morning papers. Dan Downing robbed me of my glory once, but he will not do so this time. The game shall be played through to a finish, just as I originally planned. Get ready to go out without delay."

She obeyed.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DISAPPEARED.

A CAB drew up at the door of Calvin Webster's magnificent residence, and, a few moments after, a man and a woman came down the steps.

One minute later, the cab was rolling down the avenue.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Broadway Bob. "Who says fate is against me now? Everything is turning my way!"

Irma had worn a heavy cloak and veil, so she would not be recognized by any pedestrian who happened to be passing her father's house when she came out. She now lay back in the cab, not offering to speak.

The triumph of the Rounder seemed complete. In truth, it appeared as if everything had turned his way, for who was there now to throw an obstruction in his path? The helpless victims of his evil power were fully at his mercy.

Villainy was victorious!

His blood was bounding as he sat there beside the girl he had plotted and schemed and committed murder to obtain. He felt a desire to shout his satisfaction, but kept his feelings partially in check.

Suddenly a new thought came to him.

What need had there been of taking her from the house in order to carry out the deception of a mock rescue? He might have left her there and reported the rescue to the police, which would have served his purpose quite as well.

He fell to wondering if the servants knew of her presence in the house. Certainly none of them had seen her leave it, for he had taken care to have the hypnotized broker get the servants in a part of the house where they could not possibly see anything that transpired in front.

"Irma."

"Yes, darling."

"Do you love me?"

"With all my heart!"

Her lips uttered the words, but the answer was mechanical and spiritless. Somehow it did not satisfy him at all.

Suddenly there was a great commotion on the street. Shouts, cries of fear and warning, the clanging of a bell, the rattle of wheels, and then there came a terrific shock that overturned the cab in a moment.

Booth was stunned and lay helplessly amid the wreck.

Three big policemen dashed up and attended to the plunging and frightened horses, while some of the gathering crowd looked after the inmates of the cab.

In a few moments, the Rounder regained consciousness and looked around.

"What was it—what happened?" he asked.

"A runaway fire-truck overturned you, sir," was the reply. "You don't seem to be cut or bruised that I can discover."

"But the lady who was with me—where is she?"

"A lady—was there a lady with you?"

"Yes, yes!"

"I have not seen her."

"She was uninjured," declared another. "She was taken away by a friend."

"A friend!" shouted Bob, in greatest amazement. "Who?"

"I don't know who he was."

"A man?"

"Yes."

"Young or middle-aged?"

"Well, now, I can't say. I was paying more attention to you. It was thought you were seriously injured."

"Can no one tell me who took the lady away?"

No one replied.

In vain the Rounder made inquiries. The veiled lady had vanished in a most singular manner, and not a person seemed able to tell who the friend was that took her away.

Then Broadway Bob raved and fumed like one gone insane. Indeed, it was thought the shock he had received had injured him mentally. He utterly refused at first to state who the lady was, but he was finally induced to tell the police it was Irma Webster. Then it became necessary to explain how she happened to be in the cab with him when all New York supposed her dead or in the hands of kidnappers, and he told a rather incoherent story about rescuing her from the rascals who had abducted her.

Bob found himself besieged by a host of reporters and by the police, and he grasped the first opportunity to escape from them.

His first act was to rush back to Irma's home and discover she was not there. After that, he started all his friends to search for her, but this proved fruitless.

Irma had disappeared once more.

Not a trace of her or her mysterious friend could be found.

The morning papers had a new sensation. They told in various ways the remarkable tale of the broker's daughter being rescued from her dastardly kidnappers by her affianced husband, Robert Booth. Broadway Bob was made to seem a perfect hero in every report. Then the papers went on to describe the collision with the runaway fire-truck and the strange after-vanishing of the rescued girl.

"This second mysterious disappearance," read one of the papers, "is astounding, to say the very least. It does not seem possible one of the unfortunate principals in such an accident could so swiftly and so completely vanish in such a remarkably brief space of time, for search was instituted for her immediately on the recovery of Mr. Booth, who was only dazed or stunned for a very few moments."

"Another mystery is the identity of the unknown man who came forward at the time of the accident and took the girl away. That she must have known him is certain, else she would not have gone with him so readily, for it is asserted she was not injured in the least, as far as could be ascertained."

"It is also most remarkable that no one can be found who can accurately describe the appearance of this man. Twenty different witnesses have given as many different descriptions. Some declare he was an old, white-haired gentleman, while others assert he was young and well-dressed. One woman asserts he was a rather rosyish-appearing fellow, who wore a black patch over his left eye, but it is not possible the daughter of Calvin Webster should recognize any such a person among her personal friends."

"From beginning to end, this whole affair has been shrouded in mystery, and at the present time the mystery seems deeper than ever. In the mean time, the police are hard at work."

Another paper contained a crisp editorial that cast rather grave reflections on the police, ridiculing them for their inability to track down the kidnappers and rescue the girl, a feat that had been accomplished by the "gallant and grief-distracted bridegroom." The editorial ended by calling on the department to reclaim itself by solving without delay the secret of this second disappearance and restoring the missing girl to her father and the "brave man who loved her."

Broadway Bob eagerly scanned the papers, and there was a feeling of satisfaction in his heart when he saw how well a portion of his plot worked. Not the least discredit was cast on his wonderful tale of the rescue of the unfortunate girl from her kidnappers.

A sudden startled cry broke from his lips, however, when he perused the description of the man who had taken Irma away after the accident.

"A rather rowdyish-appearing fellow who wore a black patch over his left eye!" he shouted. "Holy smoke! It is my evil genius!"

None of the other descriptions interested him after seeing that, for he firmly believed it to be correct.

"Now that Downing and St. Clair are dead, another whelp seems to have arisen to pester me! If I find him, I will be able to trace Irma."

He sought Sleek, and was successful in finding the bogus detective.

"I have work for you," Bob declared.

"Dan Downing has—"

"Dan Downing has nothing! This is not connected with him in any way."

"But I thought he had secured the girl again!"

"You thought so? Look here, Sleek, I'm hanged if you don't seem to know too much about this affair! You say you thought he had secured the girl again. Now, I can't say I like the sound of that word 'again.' What do you mean by it?"

"Nothing—nothing at all."
 "Are you sure?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, let it drop. As I said, I have work for you."
 "I am ready."
 "That is good. I want you to find the man who has Irma Webster."
 "Who—Downing?"
 "Not at all. You need not trouble yourself about him any more."
 "I haven't been able to get my eyes on him lately."
 "Never mind if you do not get your eyes on him at all. He has withdrawn from the game."
 "What do you mean?"
 "It won't hurt you if you don't know."
 "But I fancied the girl was with Downing."
 "That is where you fancied wrong. I am almost persistently followed by a slouchy tough—a fellow with an evil face and a patch over his eye. Look here."
 Bob gave the bogus detective the paper in his hand, pointing to the description of the rowdyish fellow who, the unknown woman asserted, had taken the girl away.
 "I see—I understand," nodded the Shadow.
 "You believe that description is correct?"
 "Yes."
 "You want me to find this fellow?"
 "I do."
 "I will try it."
 "If you find him, track him to his hole."
 "All right, sir."
 "Then come to me without delay. This will be money in your pocket, if you succeed. I have worked hard enough at this little affair, and now I deserve what I have earned."
 "The wages of sin is death!" a mysterious voice seemed to whisper in the air.
 The Rounder turned pale and the haunted look appeared in his eyes for a moment.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NOT DEAD.

HAROLD ST. CLAIR'S relatives began to be alarmed by his prolonged absence and their inability to get any trace of him. It began to look suspicious, and they called on the police to trace him.
 Then the newspapers had another sensation, which they connected with the puzzling Webster affair, for it was known the young man had been an admirer of the broker's daughter.
 One paper came out hinting and insinuated that possibly the missing man had been in some way connected with the kidnapping, as he was an unsuccessful suitor for Miss Webster's hand. Possibly he was "laying low" just then.
 This brought a chuckle of satisfaction to the lips of Broadway Bob.
 "I couldn't have them think anything that would please me more!" he muttered.
 The only cloud on his horizon was the second vanishing of Irma.
 What had become of her?
 The man with the patch over his eye was also "keeping shady."
 Sleek did not seem able to get a trace of the fellow.
 But Bob himself was more fortunate.
 The night following the accident that had robbed him of Irma he saw the man with the patch hurrying swiftly along Twenty-Fourth street.
 Bob immediately followed.
 The unknown seemed in a great hurry, and he evidently did not imagine he was followed, for he took no precautions to foil the tracker.
 In a rather low locality not far from Eighth avenue the unknown entered a narrow passage between two miserable wooden buildings.
 The shadower hurried forward and peered into the passage, being just in time to see a dark figure disappear into a doorway.
 "I am going to follow, come what may!" grated Bob, as he plunged into the darkness of the place.
 The doorway was standing wide open, and he entered, being fortunate in meeting no one.
 But, after getting inside, he was at a loss which way to turn.
 Looking about, he saw a ray of light that came through a tiny crack some distance away.
 Cautiously he strode to the crack, to which he applied his eye.
 He nearly uttered a cry of satisfaction.
 He found himself looking into a room which was lighted by a small lamp, and the light showed him the man with the patch.
 At last, the mysterious individual had been traced to his retreat.
 Somehow, Bob fancied there was something familiar about the appearance of the man.
 He was not prepared for what followed.
 The man snatched the old hat from his head and also removed the patch from over his eye. Then he took off a wig of false hair and washed some of the lines from his face, showing they had been skillfully penciled there. As he turned, towel in hand, having wiped his face, Broadway Bob nearly fell helpless to the floor.
 "Great Heaven!" the Rounder gasped. "It is not possible!"
 As soon as he could regain his composure somewhat, he again peered through the crack.

The man within had restored the towel to its hook and was putting on a decent coat in place of the ragged one he had removed.
 Broadway Bob breathed hard. He was really tempted to turn and take to his heels, believing he saw something superhuman, but he rightly reasoned that spirits did not wash their faces and comb their hair.
 "That is Harold St. Clair, or his double!" whispered the man peering through the crack.
 In truth, the person within the room was the perfect image of young St. Clair.
 Bob scarcely thought it possible at first that it could be his hated rival, but with each passing moment, he became more and more convinced that, in some remarkable manner, Harold had escaped death in the cellar of the haunted house in Jersey.
 He was not long left in doubt.
 A door opened and another person entered the room, at the sight of whom the Rounder smote his fists together with joy and satisfaction, for it was Irma!
 The moment the girl saw the other person in the room, she uttered a glad cry and rushed toward him.
 "Oh, Harold!" she exclaimed. "I am so glad you are back!"
 It was truly Harold St. Clair.
 He caught her in his arms and held her close to his breast, looking lovingly into her eyes.
 "I am glad to get back to you, my darling," he tenderly declared.
 He kissed her again and again, and she submitted to his caresses, a sight which aroused the hot blood of the watching man beyond the partition.
 "It is so lonely here!" she finally said, "and these rooms are so bare and cold!"
 "They are not much like your own luxurious chambers, I know. Irma, hadn't you better change your mind and permit me to take you back to your home?"
 "No, no; not now!" she cried, with a sudden show of fear. "I am safer here than in my own home!"
 "I think that is true, but can you endure this kind of life?"
 "Oh, yes. Mother Grogan is very kind to me. She has told me how you saved her boy from drowning once and how much he thought of you all his life, poor fellow!"
 "Why, he is not dead?"
 "Is not dead?" repeated Irma, in surprise.
 "Mother Grogan mourns him as one dead."
 "She may not live to see him again. He was given fifteen years for having a hand in the taking off of a West Side tough. Danny swore he dropped the fellow through the floor in self-defense; but he was sent up just the same, as he had a crooked record behind him. It nearly broke his old mother's heart."
 "It does not seem as if such a kind old lady could have a wayward son.—But, tell me the very latest news."
 "There is not much to tell. The police haven't struck the faintest clue to work on. Of course the excitement over your second disappearance is great."
 "Did you see Robert Booth?"
 "Not this time."
 "My only fear is that he will find me here."
 "You need not fear that, for there is not one chance in a hundred that he will find you. Such a thing will not happen."
 "Don't fool yourself!" cried Bob, as he cast himself against the door and burst it open. "I am here!"
 His entrance was something in the nature of a thunderbolt from a clear sky. The lovers started back, Irma uttering a little shriek of terror and pressing her face down on Harold's shoulders, while the young man encircled her waist with his strong arm.
 "So you are not dead!" sneered Broadway Bob. "It takes more than rats to kill you, eh? Well, I won't leave you to the rodents next time. I will finish you myself!"
 "You may not have the chance," was the calm reply. "I know you for just what you are, Booth; and not much time will pass before you stand at the bar of justice to answer for your crimes."
 "Pah! That sounds well, but it is all wind! I have come for that girl."
 "You will not get her!"
 "We shall see."
 Bob started forward.
 "Back!" flashed Harold, suddenly producing a pistol. "I will shoot you like the hound you are, if you attempt to put a hand on her!"
 Bob paused a moment, and then he made a swift spring, striking fairly in the middle of the floor.
 Another leap would bring him within reach of the lovers.
 It was not made.
 The floor gave way beneath his feet, and, with a hoarse cry, he shot downward out of sight!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A STRUGGLE ON THE STREET.

THE sudden disappearance of Broadway Bob was astounding, to say the very least.
 In the center of the floor, at the very spot

where he struck on making the leap, a large square opening appeared.
 There had been a hidden trap-door in the floor, and the weight of the Rounder had burst it open.
 Booth had plunged into the cellar.
 How far had he fallen?
 The door opened into utter darkness, but Harold caught up the lamp and was on the point of advancing and peering downward. Irma, however, caught him by the arm and held him back, crying warning:
 "Look out! He may not have been injured, and he always carries a pistol!"
 "I do not fear his pistol."
 "Still, he might shoot you from the cellar."
 At this juncture, the door to the adjoining room opened and a fleshy old Irish woman waddled into the room. She started back with uplifted hands when she saw the open trap in the floor.
 "Howly Mither!" she cried. "Av Danny's trap-dure isn't open, Oi dunno!"
 "Don't go there, Mother Grogan—don't go near it!" cried Irma.
 "Whoy not?"
 "There is a man in the cellar."
 "How th' divvil did he come there?"
 "He fell through the trap."
 "Well, thin, it's kilt he may be intoirely, for it's through that silfsoame thrap me Danny dropped th' Knifer. Sure an' th' Knifer shtruck on his own stabber, which soame he hid in the harnd av him, but th' fall is no smar! distance."
 "If Broadway Bob is dead, it will be a blessing!" declared Harold. "But that rascal is not killed so easily."
 "Right you are, St. Clair!" cried a voice from the darkness of the cellar. "I will live to do you up yet!"
 Irma nearly fainted with terror.
 "Oh, let us fly from this place!" she panted.
 "He will find his way out of the cellar in a few moments, and then—"
 "And then I will meet him fairly. He shall not touch you, my darling."
 But Irma was too terrified to be quieted, and she would not think of remaining there.
 "We will have to leave here anyway," she declared. "Mother Grogan has been very kind, but we can stay here no longer, now that wretch has discovered our place of concealment."
 Harold knew she spoke the truth.
 "Where shall we go?"
 "Anywhere—anywhere to get away from here—and him!"
 It was useless for Mother Grogan to urge them to stay, for the fear-shaken girl would not listen. Irma lost no time in securing her wraps, and they were soon ready for the street.
 "Where is the opening to the cellar?" asked Harold.
 "It cooms out in th' alley," replied the good-hearted Irishwoman, who really grieved to part with them.
 "Then you do not fear any harm from Broadway Bob?"
 "Nivver a bit. All me loife hiv Oi bin in th' midst av thieves arnd toughs, an' nivver yit wur Oi afeard av one av thim."
 Being thus assured, they had no hesitation in leaving her. Their only fear was that Bob had already escaped from the cellar and was waiting for them in the darkness of the passage.
 This did not prove to be true, however, and they were soon on the street.
 "We will take the first cab we come upon," said Harold.
 But they were not destined to take a cab very soon.
 Three semi-intoxicated toughs came swaggering along and nearly ran them down.
 "Hey, hello here!" cried one. "Who might dis be wid his best gal?"
 Irma uttered a little cry.
 The voice was that of the thug, Tom Duke.
 As the girl shrunk back, the fitful glare of a street-light fell on her pale but beautiful face, and the Slugger uttered an exclamation of astonishment.
 "Blow me stiff!" he growled. "Dis is der gal w'ot der Rounder is havin' sech a fuss over! Hully jee! I jest guess we're right in it!"
 He advanced to clutch Irma.
 Never in all his pugilistic encounters had Duke received such a terrific swinging blow as struck him then. He was hit fairly on the left ear, lifted from his feet and cast headlong to the rough cobblestones of the street, where he lay like one hit by lightning.
 The Slugger's companions were astounded by the sudden and unexpected overthrow of their mate, and they stood for some seconds, staring first at the prostrate form of Tom Duke and then at the slender, white-faced young man who had knocked the thug down.
 "Do me eyes behole such t'ings as dis!" cried one.
 "Holy smokes! w'ot did der feller have in his fist?" inquired the other.
 Irma tried to drag Harold away, but the young man knew better than to turn his back on the toughs, for they would have leaped on him in an instant.
 "We'll jest have ter do dis feller!"
 "Dat's w'ot we will!"

Harold thrust Irma behind him and prepared to meet the men squarely, although the odds were against him.

"You had better keep away!" he cried. "I will turn you both over to the police!"

He could not have spoken a more unfortunate thing. The mere mention of the police seemed to arouse the ruffians to the greatest fury, and they sprung forward.

"Swipe him!"

"T'row him cold!"

But they were not destined to find Harold an easy victim. They had been drinking, which was somewhat to St. Clair's advantage, and he made the very most of his opportunities.

Smack! biff! First one and then the other felt Harold's hard knuckles, and they were sent staggering to the right and left. In a moment they had recovered and were at him again. Blows fell thickly, and the young man did not escape entirely unscathed. However, he scarcely seemed to notice when he was hit, but he delivered such telling strokes in return that the thugs were somewhat dazed.

"He's der devil!" panted one. "I can't git me grippers on him!"

"No more can I," returned the other. "He's like a jumpin' frog!"

Suddenly lowering his head, Harold sprung forward and drove it full into the stomach of one of the toughs, upsetting the fellow in an instant.

He turned just in time to dodge a blow from the other, and he caught his breath when he saw the weapon in the man's hand.

No longer were the thugs fighting with bare fists.

They were armed with sand-bags!

Harold thought of his revolver and tried to get it out, but the hammer caught and prevented his accomplishing his purpose, while one of the two wretches came near laying him out with a well-directed blow.

"This can't keep up long," thought Harold.

"We must attract somebody's attention."

Then he shouted for help.

"Git at him lively!" snarled the one he had butted over, as he scrambled to his feet. "He'll wake der hull neighborhood!"

Once more he had both of the thugs after him, and it was only with the greatest skill at dodging he avoided being knocked senseless.

He did receive two heavy blows, one on the arm and the other on the shoulder, which seemed to benumb his whole side for a moment.

Still he did not falter. He knew what it meant to be overcome just then, and he had made up his mind that they should not down him.

A savage kick again sent one of them to the cobble-stones, and then, to avoid being hit with the terrible bag, he grappled with the other.

The excitement of the fight had in a measure cleared the fellow's brain of the haze liquor had put upon it, and he showed he was no mean antagonist. But for the fact that Harold was an active member of the Manhattan Athletic Club, he might have been easily overcome.

"You's puttin' up a stiff scrap fer a softie!" panted the tough, who really felt some admiration for the man he was trying to "do." "I never knowed any of your kind ter do anytin' like dis afore!"

Harold made no reply, for he did not believe in wasting his breath in such a manner. Suddenly getting as far under the tough as possible, he lifted the fellow from his feet and gave him a backward fling.

Both went down, but Harold was uppermost. He tore himself free and arose to his feet, being barely in time to avoid a blow from the other wretch, who had recovered his footing.

Then came another clinch.

Fortunately, this fellow did not prove as strong as his comrade, and Harold managed to fling him off.

A sudden cry came from one of the thugs.

"Der cops! Sneak!"

Harold saw dark figures hurrying in that direction, and he shouted for assistance, grasping one of the rascals.

The desperado wheeled and struck at the young man again, and Harold was not successful in entirely avoiding the blow. He was sent staggering backward, only keeping from falling by catching at a lamp-post, and then the thugs suddenly vanished in the gloom of an alley.

The two policemen who came panting to the spot found the young man clinging to the lamp-post, but apparently on the point of collapsing.

"Thank Heaven!" he gasped. "I saved her from those dastardly wretches!"

"Saved who, young feller?" asked one of the officers.

Harold braced up and looked around for Irma.

She had disappeared!

Tom Duke had also vanished!

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SLUGGER GETS LEFT.

FAINTING with terror and despair, Irma clung to the iron railing, which happened to be near at hand, and watched Harold's wonderful battle against odds. Every moment she expected to

see him knocked down by one of the two thugs, but still he kept on his feet and continued to deal fearful blows right and left, causing his assailants to reel and curse.

"Heaven help him!" entreated the poor girl. "Save me from again falling into the hands of Broadway Bob or his villainous tools!"

She paid little heed to Tom Duke, who it seemed, had been knocked out by that first terrific blow from the iron fist of Irma's brave protector. Had she noticed the chief rascal more, it would have been better for her.

After a few moments, Duke sat up and gazed around, a trifle dazed, still comprehending what had taken place. He saw the swaying and leaping figures of the fiercely-struggling men, but he did not offer to aid his friends.

"Dey'll be able ter down dat tender kid," thought the Slugger, arising to his feet. "I'll take keer of der gal."

Like a cat, he crept up behind Irma, suddenly grasping her and placing a hand over her mouth, while he hissed:

"If yer makes a yowl, I'll twist yer woozle—yes, I'll help dem boys do dat tender mug w'ot ye'r stuck on up so he won't git out der hospital fer six weeks!"

Irma did not make an outcry, and Duke dragged her swiftly away.

"Don't you be a fool!" advised the Slugger. "Me and Bob Booth is yer best friends, see? We'll use yer right. Why, der Rounder was goin' ter take yer bome all squee! Why didn't yer let him, 'stead of skippin'? You're a daisy, but you makes me languid, see?"

"Please don't crush my arm! You hurt me so!" sobbed the poor girl.

"Hurt yer?" gasped Tom, surprised. "Well, youse must be tender! Dat's an easy grip. I knows w'ot youse wants—yer wants ter break an' make a run fer it."

"Oh, no, no! You hurt me—you really do! I feel so strangely—I—I think I'm going to faint!"

"Holy jeel! don't do dat!" cried the pugilist, in great alarm. "I dunno w'ot ter do for a gal dat faints!"

Irma staggered somewhat, and he almost carried her. For a time she scarcely knew what was happening, for she was in the border-land of unconsciousness, even though she did not quite lose her senses.

Duke soon turned into a dark and narrow alley, a place that seemed utterly deserted.

"Dem boys oughter hev dat kid laid out by dis time," he muttered, pausing a moment and peering back. "Dey won't know w'ot has become o' me."

Of a sudden, Irma seemed to realize her position—seemed to understand she was completely in the power of this unscrupulous wretch and was being dragged into the darkness of a deserted alley. With a fierce burst of strength, she broke from Duke's clutch, struck him full in the face with both her clinched hands, and then turned to flee.

She tried to scream for help, but her panting breaths cut the cries short in her throat.

For one instant, Duke was astounded beyond measure, and then he sprung after her. He quickly overtook the girl and caught her up in his arms.

"Dern me if der little bird wasn't goin' ter fly! Now, I can't have dat—I really can't!"

"Help!" screamed Irma.

His broad hand closed over her mouth and he plunged back into the darkness of the alley.

"Dry up dat squawkin'!" was his brutal order. "Der people roun' here won't bodder dere heads 'bout youse, my pritty."

Down into the gloomy alley he hurried, carrying her as easily as if she had been a child. She did not struggle now or make any attempt to cry out. In fact, she lay so passively in his arms that he began to grow alarmed.

Reaching a dark nook down by some staggering steps, he stopped and placed her on her feet.

"Stan' up here, gal," he ordered. "Don't try none o' yer funny rackets on dis mug! Yer can't fool me."

But she only sunk down limply in a heap at his feet.

"Well, he growled, "dis is w'ot I calls great sport! I'll be kicked if dat gal don't act queer."

Tom lighted a match and held it close to Irma's face. Her eyes were closed and she was very pale.

"Guess dis is a faint," he muttered, as the match went out. "I told her better—told her I didn't know how ter tend a gal w'ot fainted. She'd oughter hed 'nuff consideration fer my feelin's ter keep all right."

For some moments he stood with his hands on his hips, staring down at that dark bundle at his feet, and then a sudden thought seemed to strike him.

"All right," the Slugger nodded. "I'll jest let her be so. She won't give me so much trouble. If she was all right, she might squeal ur sometin'; but dere hain't no danger o' her squealin' now. An' she won't run away. I'll jest pull her up in der corner here, while I trot back an' see if der boys have done der softie."

He pulled the limp figure close under the

steps, and then he turned and hurried back along the alley, soon reaching the street.

At that moment, two panting figures came sneaking swiftly along.

Tom gave a hiss, which was answered in a similar manner.

"Is dat youse, Murphy an' French?"

"You bet!" was the reply, as the two figures instantly approached.

"Did yer go t'rough der bloke?" asked Tom.

"Go t'rough nuthin'!" was the disgusted reply. "Dat feller was der biggest scrapper I ever run up against!"

"Dat's w'ot he was," the other thug agreed. "An' dodge—he could dodge chain lightnin'!"

"An' der fists of him was junks of iron!"

"An' he used his head as a batterin'-ram!"

"An' he kicked like a mule!"

"An' hollered!"

"Den der coppers showed up."

"Bout dat time we sprinted."

They paused for breath, and Tom asked:

"Didn't yer git one rap at him?"

"None dat 'mounted ter anytin'."

"Well, I'll have ter hunt him up," asserted the pugilist. "He biffed me a good one, an' I perpose ter square der score."

"Where is der gal?"

"Oh, I got her all right," triumphantly assured the Slugger. "I t'ought youse fellers was good fer dat one mug, and so I slid out wid der gal. She fainted same as dem soft gals do, an' I left her down here while I looked fer youse. Come on."

He led the way into the alley, and his villainous companions followed close at his heels.

In a few seconds they reached the steps where Tom had left Irma Webster.

To their disgust and dismay, she was not there!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DOUBTFUL PROTECTION.

IRMA had not fainted at all, but she pretended to be unconscious in order to deceive Tom Duke.

She succeeded in her purpose.

The moment the Slugger left her, she arose to her feet and stole away down the alley, her heart throbbing painfully and her breath fluttering over her parted lips.

She knew not where she was going, her only thought being to get way from the wretch who had dragged her to that dismal place.

On and on she ran, holding out her hands blindly. Once she tripped and fell, but quickly scrambled to her feet and ran again.

She fancied she heard pursuing feet behind her, and that nerved her to greater exertions.

Suddenly, she found further progress checked by a bare wall.

Despair in her heart, she tried to find some exit from the place.

In vain!

It was a blind alley, and there was but one entrance and exit!

She was still in a trap!

"What can I do? what shall I do?" she panted, feeling as if she were now on the verge of fainting in earnest. "I must get out of this place, or that wretch will find me again!"

How was it to be done?

She turned back.

In a few moments she heard the sound of approaching voices among which she recognized Duke's.

"I am lost!" she gasped, looking around for a place of concealment.

She saw some steps that led downward into the darkness, and another moment found her feeling her way down them.

There was a door at the bottom, but she succeeded in pushing it open. The dank, unpleasant smell of a disused cellar came to her nostrils, but she did not hesitate about entering the place, feeling that it might afford shelter from the human brutes she feared.

Slowly she made her way into the darkness of the gloomy place, holding out her hands in front of her to avoid running into any obstruction. In this manner she made her way to a cemented wall that was wet and chilling to the touch.

She paused and listened.

What was that?

Thump! thump! thump!

The sound of blows came from beyond the wall. At first, it seemed as if the sounds were caused by the beating of her own heart but she soon discovered her error.

Moving slowly along the wall, she soon came to the spot nearest the sounds, and there she found a heavy door, which was quivering and shaking with every blow.

Wondering what it all meant, she stood there in the darkness of the wretched place, listening to the sodden sounds.

At length, the door gave somewhat, and to her ears came a low cry of joy and the spoken words:

"I will soon be free—free!"

Then she understood that in the cellar beyond was a captive who was working for liberty, and all the sympathy of her tender heart went out to

him. Examining the door by means of touch, she soon discovered the fastenings; but the efforts of the captive made it impossible for her to move them.

"If he would only stop pushing and pounding on the door," she thought.

Summoning all her boldness, she called:

"Hello!"

"Who calls?" came back, in hollow, muffled tones.

"A friend."

"Good! Help me open this infernal door, friend. I will pay you well to set me free. Make haste!"

But she recognized the voice now, and she fell back in sudden horror, gasping:

"It is Bob Booth!"

The discovery seemed to rob her of her strength for the time, and she felt as if she were stifling, while her limbs trembled beneath her.

It seemed that cruel fortune was against her, for she had been driven back to this spot, and was in danger of again falling into the hands of the chief rascal of the Tenderloin thugs.

She felt that she could not remain there. Better to take her chance in the alley, for Broadway Bob might burst down that door at any moment.

Without delay, she sought the exit from the cellar and hurried out into the open air. Trusting to luck, she hurried along the alley.

For once, it did seem that fortune was with her, as she turned from the three toughs and soon found herself on the street.

Breathing a prayer of thankfulness, she sped swiftly away, and in a very short time was out on Eighth avenue.

At about nine o'clock in the evening Eighth avenue from Fourteenth street to the Park is one of the liveliest thoroughfares in New York. Here all classes beneath the top crust of fashion seem to meet and mingle. Of course none of the Four Hundred are ever seen in that locality, but the frequenters of the avenue do not seem to miss them at all.

A trifle dazed, Irma staggered through the throng, utterly unable to tell where she was going. She did not heed the many admiring glances she attracted, and she was not aware she received special notice.

Suddenly, however, she found a showily-dressed man at her side. The stranger wore a silk hat and carried a waxwood cane that was ornamented with a profusion of silver. Rings adorned his ungloved hand, and a diamond flashed in his spotless cream-colored ascot tie. His heavy black mustache glistened with brillaintine and was waxed to diamond points.

This individual lifted his hat with true Eighth avenue courtesy, and spoke to Irma in a manner that was intended to be "killing" in the extreme.

To his surprise, she started from him, uttering a little cry of fear, a look of terror appearing in her eyes.

"Now don't go to bein' leery, my dear," purred the swell, as he reached her side again. "I don't mean to frighten youse. You're a lady, and I knows it. I'm a gent, see?"

He had described himself accurately by that one telling word—"gent." No one would dispute his claim to the title.

"Go away!" entreated Irma.

"Oh, come now, darling! I—"

She caught her breath and fled across the street, dodging between a silently flitting bicycle and a heavy truck.

The "gent" was astonished and angered by her sudden move, and he lost no time in following her.

"I ain't in der habit of havin' ducks skip me in this way!" he muttered. "When Elegant Jim makes a brace at a girl, she allus flops right inter his arms. Dis bird is shy, but I'll catch her yit."

Glancing back, Irma saw she was pursued.

Elegant Jim, as the masher had called himself, misinterpreted the meaning of that glance.

"I knowed she was all right!" chuckled the cur, as he quickened his steps. "She'd never looked back if she hadn't wanted me to follow. If she wasn't fine as silk, I'd let her go fer playin' soft that way; but I swear she is a beaut!"

Seeing a policeman, Irma was on the point of appealing to him for protection, when she suddenly remembered who she was and that she might have to give an account of herself to the officer.

"Merciful Father!" she sobbed. "I dare not speak to him! I must trust to myself to get away from this brute who is following me."

Elegant Jim chuckled again when he saw the girl turn down one of the dark streets, leaving the brilliantly-lighted avenue.

"Dis is a reg'lar chase!" he laughed. "But der game is wort' tryin' for."

He hastened down the dark street, seeing the figure flitting along before him. On the avenue Jim would not have ruined his dignity by running, but he did so now.

"Wonder how she happens to be livin' down here?" he thought. "She was dressed out of sight, an' dis is a reg'lar tough section."

He was overtaking the fleeing girl. She heard his pursuing footsteps behind her and turned her head to glance back. As she did so, her

foot caught and she fell heavily being a trifle stunned.

Elegant Jim picked her up.

"Too bad, darling!" he said, in a manner that was meant to be soothing. "I'm sorry yer took a tumble, but yer hadn't oughter run fer it. I knows all about shy birds, but dey git used to me pretty quick, an' dey finds me a jolly good feller. By jee! you're a beaut' of der first water! I'm dead stuck on your style. Gimme kiss!"

He had her in his arms and his vile lips were approaching her unsullied ones. She felt his hot breath on her cheek, and her very soul was stirred with deepest horror and repugnance. With the last bit of strength she possessed, she tried to break from his grasp, begging piteously for mercy.

"What are you doing to that girl, Elegant Jim?" asked a feminine voice.

He started and uttered an exclamation of anger.

"Dat you, Mag?"

"Yes. Let that girl alone!"

"Who are you orderin'?"

"I know. I saw you when you pursued her off the avenue. She was nearly frightened out of her senses."

"Dat's all game. She was just playin' ter catch a sucker."

"I know better, Jim. I know a pure face when I see it, and this girl is not the kind you think."

"Well, youse hain't no business settin' yourself up as her protector."

"Why not?"

"Your record ain't none too clean."

"That doesn't make any difference."

"Oh, save me!" implored Irma. "Save me from this creature, and I will do anything for you!"

"Let her go, Jim!"

"I won't!"

"Then I'll blow your last job to the police. They would like to know who strangled poor Maggie O'Brien."

"For God's sake, Madge!" gasped the man, suddenly stricken with fear.

"Come with me," and the woman took Irma's arm.

"She can go," snapped Elegant Jim; "but I wouldn't give much fer der kind of perfection she'll get out of you, Red Madge!"

CHAPTER XL.

A TOUCH OF HUMAN NATURE.

THE unfortunate girl was only too glad to escape by any means from the licentious wretch who had pursued and overtaken her, and she clung to the arm of the kindly-spoken woman as they moved from the spot.

Elegant Jim evidently feared the woman, for he did not follow them.

"Where is your home?" Irma's protector asked.

The girl hesitated.

"I have none—now," she finally replied.

"Then I will take you to mine."

"Oh, you are so kind!"

In a short time they reached their destination. The outside of the house looked wretched enough, and Irma was surprised to find it comfortably, almost luxuriously, furnished when they had entered.

The woman noticed Irma's wondering looks.

"You don't understand it, eh? Why, my dear, I have lived in one of the most fashionable quarters of the city. Just now I am living here because I can have those I choose as associates visit me here without arousing suspicion. Now, you may not understand that, but it is all the explanation I shall make. I know you did not ask me for as much as that, for you are too well bred. At the same time, I saw the question in your eyes."

Irma looked at the woman. She was fashionably dressed and, just then, had the appearance of a Fifth avenue promenader. Her face was rather handsome, although there was something about it that did not impress the girl favorably. That something was the trace of dissipation, which the greatest art could not fully hide.

"Make yourself quite at home, my dear," urged the mistress of the place. "You have not told me your name."

The girl spoke before she thought what she was saying:

"It is Irma Webster."

Like a flash, the woman turned upon her, her eyes blazing strangely.

"What did you say?" she asked, plainly restraining her feelings.

Irma stammered, startled beyond measure.

"Did you say your name is Webster?" came slowly from the woman's lips. "Are you Calvin Webster's daughter?"

"I am—but oh! do not turn me over to the police! I must not return to my father now—I dare not!"

"Your father would not harm you?"

"No, no: it is not that! I love my father, but I am not safe in my own home."

"I am sure I do not understand you. Not safe? Surely you are safer than you could be adrift on the streets and in danger of falling into the hands of such men as I saved you from a short time ago."

"Even the dangers of the streets are to be preferred to the horrors of my own home. I cannot explain so you will understand, but if I return home, I shall fall a victim to the will of a bold villain! I cannot escape him!"

"Your father will protect you."

"He is unable to do that."

The woman looked puzzled.

"No," she slowly acknowledged, "I do not understand. I fear your brain is turned. Who is it you fear?"

"A man named Robert Booth."

"Broadway Bob?"

"Sometimes so called, I believe. Do you know him?"

"I should say I did!" laughed Red Madge.

Irma sprung up in terror.

"Is there any danger of his coming here?"

"Not in the least," was the reassuring reply. "You are perfectly safe here, my dear girl. I see you are tired and nearly unnerved. You must take off your wraps and rest here."

A sudden thought came to Irma.

"Harold!" she exclaimed—"I must find Harold!"

"Who is Harold?"

The girl hesitated, her eyes drooping and the faintest tinge of color coming to her cheeks.

"I understand," smiled Red Madge. "But you are not strong enough to find him now. After you have rested, you may seek for him. He is all right—"

"Oh, I don't know!" sobbed Irma, suddenly breaking down. "The last I saw of him he was fighting with two terrible ruffians. Perhaps they murdered him! Oh, Harold! Harold!"

She would have hurried from the house to seek for him, but Madge prevented.

"If you go out alone, you will be certain to run into Elegant Jim, or some of his like. This is not a good locality for a girl like you to wander about in at this time of night."

That restrained Irma, for she stood in greatest terror of Elegant Jim. She sobbed as if her heart would break, and Madge did her best to comfort the girl. The Queen of the Crooks had some tenderness left in her heart, for she was really touched by the distress of the girl.

For the time, the woman forgot Irma was the daughter of the man she had once called husband, but whom she now hated most intensely.

After a little, Madge brought something in a wine-glass, bidding Irma drink.

"It will do you good, my dear," was the assurance. "You need something to quiet your nerves. If you keep on, you will have hysterics soon."

So the unsuspecting girl drank.

After a time, her sobbing ceased and she began to grow drowsy. With all her energy, she sought to throw off the feeling.

"Won't you go out with me?" she asked. "I must try to find Harold. He will not know what has become of me. It would be so good of you, and you are kind—very kind."

"We will go out in a little while," softly assured Madge. "You must lie down and rest first. Here is a nice soft bed"—throwing open some portieres. "Let me help you to the bed. You need to rest, my dear."

"I am tired," confessed Irma; "and sleepy—oh, so sleepy! If I should fall asleep—you would wake—me soon?"

"Yes, dear."

Red Madge assisted her to the bed, and Irma flung herself heavily upon it, murmuring:

"Oh, so sleepy—sleepy! Wake me—in a few—minutes. You are—so kind! I love you—and—"

She slept!

Red Madge stood looking down at the placid and sweetly beautiful face and her own features softened somewhat.

"Poor child!" she murmured. "She is so innocent and trusting and she actually said she loved me! Loved me! I have heard those words many times, but it has been years since I last heard them spoken with tenderness and sincerity. I wonder what Satan's brew it was in my blood that made me turn my back on an honorable life and become what I am? To-day I might be living with Calvin Webster, a courted and respected woman, holding a place in society, but I preferred the crooked path."

"Webster married again when he was clear of me, but this child's mother rests over in Greenwood. It is business now. Fortune has thrown Webster's daughter into my hands, and he shall pay dearly before he looks on her face again."

"And still she said she loved me! Once I was pure and innocent as she. But, high or low, there is little shelter for innocence and purity in this great city!"

"Sleep on, my poor dear! You know not what disgrace or sorrow life may bring to you."

And stooping, Red Madge, Queen of the Crooks, tenderly touched her lips to the soft cheek of the unconscious girl!

CHAPTER XLI.

A STRANGE WOMAN.

THE strange woman softly stole from the room, closing the portieres behind her.

"Now," she muttered, the hard look returning

to her face, "I will make a call on Calvin Webster. Ha! ha! ha! It has been many years since he looked on my face, but he shall see me to-night. I need some money, and he must come down generously. I have a fancy Broadway Bob is playing a double game here, and I will attempt to scoop a little something on the side. Booth will have to rise early if he gets ahead of Red Madge and the Tigers. He had better have a care, or the Tigers may take a fancy to rend him. He must use us square."

She donned her wraps and soon left the house, carefully locking the door behind her.

It was not long before she found a cab and was rolling comfortably to the eastward. In this manner she arrived at Calvin Webster's Madison avenue residence.

Ascending the steps, the notorious woman unhesitatingly rung the bell.

The servant who appeared at the door informed her it was too late for Mr. Webster to receive any callers.

"Tell him my business is of the utmost importance," she said, arrogantly. "It will not be best for him to refuse to see me."

"It is utterly useless, madam," was the firm rejoinder. "We have our orders here, and we must obey."

But she had forced her way into the house when the door was opened, and she refused to leave until Calvin Webster saw her. Finding it was useless to argue with her, the servant asked for her card.

"Never mind the card. Tell him it is a lady who wishes to see him on vital business. I will wait in the parlor."

She proceeded to make herself quite at home, while the servant, finding no other course possible, took her message to the master of the house.

He soon returned, saying courteously, yet with a tinge of triumph:

"Mr. Webster says for you to call in the morning. He will soon retire for the night."

She leaned forward in the upholstered chair, her eyes flashing brightly.

"The gentleman will have to see me to-night," declared Red Madge, Queen of the Crooks. "I have called on business that concerns him much more than it does me, and he is very uncourtous, to say the very least."

The servant stood stolidly before her.

Taking out a card-case and producing a gold pencil that was set with rubies and diamonds, the determined woman wrote a few words on the back of a plain card. They were:

"If Calvin Webster wishes to see his daughter again, he will see me without a moment's delay. If he does not, he will regret it until the day of his death!"

"Give your master that," she ordered, imperiously. "If he declines to see me after reading it, I will go quietly. Only, you must not fail to give him the card. Go now."

There was something about her manner that brooked no refusal, and she was obeyed.

When the servant returned, he informed her Mr. Webster would be down in a few moments.

Red Madge smiled a bit and lay back in the comfortable chair to await the broker's appearance.

She did not have to wait long.

Calvin Webster came down the stairs and entered the parlor.

"I beg your pardon if I have kept you waiting, madam," he said; "but I trust you will understand the situation. The hour is late, and—My God!"

He fell back when she arose to her feet, allowing the light of the chandelier to fall full on her face. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes.

"Good-evening, Calvin."

She spoke with perfect coolness, a calm, somewhat sneering smile on her face.

"You?" he said, faintly.

"Yes. I see you know me."

"Know you—yes."

"Then the years have not changed me so very much?"

He did not reply.

"Why did you come here, Jane?" he asked, somewhat brokenly. "Have I not enough to endure just now? Have you come to mock me—to sneer at me?"

In truth that had been a part of her purpose, but when she saw him standing before her so changed, so unlike his old proud self, a strange feeling crept into her heart—a feeling to which she had been a stranger for many years. She did not analyze it, but it seemed to be a mingling of pity and—was it love?

Bah! No! She had ceased to care for this man long, long ago, and she was certain she did not care for him now. Even if a spark of affection remained in her heart, she was Red Madge, Queen of the Crooks.

Not even the broker himself could have described his emotion as he looked on the face of her who had once been the wife of his heart. In the days forever gone he had really loved her, but in her own wild, relentless way she had slain all his affection and forced him to sunder the bond between them.

He had paled when he recognized her, and his hands trembled a bit. She saw the snows of old

age were creeping into his once black hair, and Time had left other indelible marks upon him.

He put out his hand and rested it on the back of a chair, steadying himself in that manner. She felt a great impulse to offer her support, but she knew it would not be accepted. He might scorn her, and she meant to show him how proud she really was.

So they stood and looked into each other's eyes, silence resting for a time between them.

"Why have you come here?" he asked again.

"Did you read what I wrote?"

"Yes."

"Then you know what brought me here."

"My child—you know something of her?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

He spoke the words imploringly, and again she felt a thrill of sympathy. It angered her to think she was so "soft," for she had believed such emotions quite foreign to her now.

"Did you expect I would tell you so readily? Did you imagine it was love or compassion for you that brought me here? You could not have been so foolish!"

He spoke slowly.

"I understand you, I think. I had hoped we might never meet again, but fate has brought us together. Fate has been very cruel to me of late, but I suppose I deserve it all, so I try to accept my lot as humbly as possible."

Again she noted how changed he was. In the olden time he would have shown his pride and scorn.

"I did not expect to find you like this."

He did not understand her meaning.

"I know not what you expected, I only know how I am bent beneath the load I have to bear. If you must add to that burden, speak quickly."

"I know where Irma is."

"Have you come to tell me? You must know my heart is torn with the torture of suspense, but you cannot know how helpless I am. I find myself unable to protect my own child, even when she is in the home nest. That is what has crushed me the most. Satan and his emissaries seem triumphant."

"Perhaps I have a price for telling you where to find her."

"I expected as much," he confessed.

"Will you pay?"

"She is my child—my only child. I am not going to make an appeal to you, for you may not know how much that means to a man like me who is all alone in the world."

For a little time the woman was silent.

"I think I do know," she finally said. "It must be horribly lonely in this great house. I should die here! But I am sure you cannot understand the perils your daughter encounters when she is not beneath this roof. This very night I rescued her from the talons of a human hawk who haunts the avenues and preys on youth and innocence. This vampire already had her in his power—held her in his embrace. Alone and unaided, she could not have obtained her freedom until he relinquished her. You know what that means."

"Oh, Heaven! And you—you saved her?"

"I saved her!"

"God bless you for that one act, Jane! I—I can't say more!"

She tried to force a scornful laugh, but it was quite a failure.

"Blessings will not buy bread, and I love a little cake now and then."

"You shall be paid—I will pay you for what you have done."

"You are willing?"

"Why shouldn't I be? Irma is all I have. Without her my wealth would be dross, for I have not so very long to need it. I did not feel this way a few weeks ago, but I am like an old man now. All the life—all the ambition has been crushed out of me. I feel that I am fast becoming a wreck!"

She saw he was in earnest. Had he rebelled, she would have ground his neck beneath her heel and felt that her revenge on him was complete. But it seemed brutal to add to the sore afflictions of this unfortunate man, even though she hated him so deeply.

Hated him? She questioned herself. Was that hatred so intense as she had imagined? Somehow it was strangely softened and changed. She was not sure she hated him at all.

"Are you ready to pay me five thousand dollars for what I have done and for taking you to your daughter?"

"Is that what you demand?"

"Yes."

"When do you want it?"

"Now."

"I have not the money at hand."

"I will take your draft and run my chances of your stopping it."

He did not demur. Going to the library, he drew up a check for the sum stated and brought it to her, having first learned the name she wished it made payable to. She took it from his hand and read it twice, making sure it was correct. Then she tore it into fragments and cast the pieces at her feet.

"Come," she said, wondering at herself; "I will lead you to Irma."

He did not understand her, but he was soon ready to accompany her. Something told him she was sincere.

They left the house and entered the cab, the woman giving instructions to the driver.

Thirty minutes later, they were at Red Madge's door.

He followed her up the steps and into the house. As they entered, they came face to face with a man who held an unconscious girl in his arms.

And that man was Broadway Bob!

CHAPTER XLII.

THE ROUNDER STILL TRIUMPHANT.

OF course the girl was Irma, who was still under the influence of the drug given her by the Queen of the Crooks.

Broadway Bob was startled by the sudden appearance of Red Madge and Calvin Webster.

He was on the point of carrying Irma from the room.

"My child!" cried the broker.

"Bob Booth!" exclaimed the Queen of the Crooks.

"Hello, Madge!" saluted Booth. "It was jolly good of you to take her in and keep her for me."

"What are you doing with that girl?" asked the woman, sternly.

"I am about to take her away," was the cool reply. "She has given me the slip times enough."

"Put her down!"

"Wretched villain!" cried the father. "Have you not caused me misery enough? Let me have her and depart!"

The Rounder whistled.

"This is like a scene in a play!" he sneered. "The father demands his child. Ha! ha! Really, it is amusing!"

"How did you happen to find her here?" asked Red Madge.

"Good luck brought me here, and I entered by the secret way."

"Ill luck brought you here, Bob Booth!"

Bob looked at Red Madge in puzzled astonishment.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked. "You have struck a new string."

"That girl is beneath my roof and under my protection, Bob Booth!" she retorted. "Attempt to take her from here at your peril!"

"This is melodrama!" he sneered. "Let the calciums blaze—touch off the red fire! Let's have the thing done up right!"

"I am in earnest!"

"You appear so, but, by Jove! I think you are daft, Madge! I can't account for it any other way."

"Think what you like, but place that girl on the couch there!"

"If I refuse, what then?"

"Refuse if you dare!"

"Very well, I dare and do refuse most emphatically."

A tiny bejeweled revolver suddenly appeared in the hand of Red Madge, and it was pointed directly at the head of Broadway Bob.

"You know I can shoot, Bob Booth!"

He was astounded.

"I know it, Madge; but I did not fancy you would turn a weapon on me."

"Well, you see you were mistaken. I tell you what I mean to do, if you don't put that girl down—I mean to send a bullet through your head!"

Something in her manner convinced him she was in deadly earnest.

"Curse it all!" he snarled. "Are you turning against me?"

"Put down the girl!"

He obeyed, turning savagely to confront them.

"If it is to be a fight I can fight better with my hands free. What does it mean?"

"There is no chance of a fight," asserted the Queen of the Crooks. "If you attempt to kick one up I'll knock you over. Now be decent, Bob, and let me have my way. You ought to be aware I will have my way when I set out."

"But I am blown if I see what you are driving at. Yesterday you were my friend and in with me on this game!"

"I fancy you are playing the game for yourself and not for others who are interested. I have changed since yesterday, Bob."

"You don't mean to try to block my trick?"

"What if I do?"

"You can't do it."

"I will tell you what I mean. I intend that this girl shall return to her home with her father. I gave him my word to that effect, and Red Madge never breaks her word."

"How much did you strike him for?"

"That is none of your business!"

The Rounder saw the woman was in a dangerous mood, and he fancied she had been drinking heavily. He knew Madge was a "terror" when she took to drink, and he did not care to really arouse her then.

What if Irma was taken home by her father? That would not baffle his aims in the least. Perhaps it would be better to get the struggle over in that way.

Then he suddenly thought of three men he had left outside the house. He wondered if they would understand the situation and get in their work.

Anyway, he decided to trust to luck. If Irma was carried home, he would let her go; but would lose little time in making her his wife. His fearful power would compel her to become that.

"All right," he laughed, assuming an easy manner and stepping from the couch. "As you say, I am in your house, and I suppose you are mistress here. Let it go at that. If Webster wants his daughter, there she is."

The broker gave a cry of joy and hastened to Irma's side, catching her up in his arms and kissing her again and again.

"Why don't you awaken!" he entreated. "Speak to me—look at me! It is I—your father!"

"She will awaken in time," assured Red Madge. "Just now she is under the influence of a sleeping powder I gave her. Do not be alarmed by the soundness of her slumber."

Calvin Webster breathed a sigh of relief. "You have been kind, Jane," he said. "I will never forget this!"

"It's nothing," she declared, a strange break in her voice. "I shall feel the better for doing one more decent act before I die. Take her and go. The cab is standing at the door, and you can take her home in that. If you will settle the whole bill with the driver, I'll call it square," and she forced a short laugh.

He lifted the sleeping girl in his arms and moved to the door, which she held open for him. Broadway Bob did not offer to interfere.

"Good-night and good-by," said the strange woman.

"Good-night," he replied, as he went out.

A moment later, a cry of pain and the shuffle of feet came from the street. Red Madge and Broadway Bob hurried out.

Calvin Webster lay stretched on the ground, but his daughter was gone.

"This is the work of your hired tools!" cried the Queen of the Crooks, turning fiercely on Broadway Bob.

His reply was a laugh of triumph.

CHAPTER XLIII.

BOB IN A BAD HUMOR.

TOM DUKE and his two thug pals had been lingering outside the house occupied by the Queen of the Crooks.

One of the window panes did not happen to be closely drawn, and through the flimsy folds of a lace curtain, they saw all that transpired within.

"Holy gee!" whispered the Slugger. "Der old gal has turned on Bob!"

They saw Red Madge pull a revolver on the Rounder and force him to relinquish Irma Webster.

"Dat's a queer game fer Madge," observed French. "Wonder wot she's at?"

"Dunno," confessed Murphy. "Looks like she is playin' inter t'oder feller's han's."

"Dat's der gal's fadder," informed Duke. "Red Madge has brought him here, dough I don't see wot fer."

"Der old cove is goin' ter git erway wid der gal!"

"We'll have ter stop dat."

So when the father came out with the unconscious child in his arms, he was promptly knocked over. The man on the cab that was waiting in front of Red Madge's house saw three figures spring out of the shadows, heard a blow, and when the figures vanished, he discovered the body of a man stretched on the walk.

"Great smoke!" gasped the driver. "This looks like murder! I ain't in it!"

With sudden and unreasonable fear, he whipped up and went rumbling away in the darkness.

When Broadway Bob and Red Madge came from the house they found Calvin Webster stretched on the stones, while the rumbling wheels of the cab could be heard in the distance.

"This is the work of your hired tools!" cried the woman.

The Rounder laughed.

"If so, they have done their work well," he said.

"The girl has been taken away in that cab."

"It appears like it."

In truth, the three ruffians with the girl in their clutches were crouching within hearing of their voices, being unable to flee up or down the street without being discovered.

"I have a mind to send a bullet through your heart!" exclaimed the Queen of the Crooks.

Bob folded his arms.

"Go ahead," he calmly said.

"Help me carry this poor man into the house," Madge commanded.

Requesting her to stand aside, the Rounder lifted the unconscious broker and bore him into the house, placing him carefully on the sofa.

"Now, you may go," said the woman.

In the mean time, the three thugs had moved away as swiftly as possible, choosing dark alleys

and passages, first one and then another carrying the still senseless girl.

Finally, they halted.

"Wot next, boss?" asked Murphy.

"I'll take care of der gal now," replied Duke.

"Wot's dat mean?"

"You fellers can slide."

"But we're in dis racket wid yer."

"You'll git paid fer wot you've done w'en I sees yer in der morning."

They did not seem to take much stock in this.

"Dat don't go down."

"It has ter, see? I'm runnin' dis biz."

"Well, you're broke, so how yer goin' ter pay?"

"I'll make der Rounder come down wid der stuff, don't yer worry 'bout dat. Dis is his gal, an' he'll pay fer her. If we should hurt her in any way, dat cove would do der whole crowd. Catch on?"

"Wot be you goin' ter do wid he?"

"Take her ter a place where der Rounder'll find her all O. K. Dis is straight goods. I gives yer der word of a gent of der ring dat you shall have yer scads fer der job in der mornin'. Meet me at Jackson's on der Bowery."

French and Murphy hesitated in a doubting manner, but they were afraid of the Slugger, and they finally slunk away in the darkness.

"Dem fellers do fer dirty work," muttered Duke; "but dey hain't ter be trusted in der gang. We are all gents in der gang, an' dat's wot makes der Tenderloin Tigers a hard crowd ter down. Dere hain't one of us but has infloance wid der high muck-a-mucks o' der Tenderloin Precinct."

"Now, we're all in dis game ter squeeze old Webster, an' I reckons we'd better take dis gal where we kin keep her till der ole bloke comes down wid der scads. Might as well make a bold bluff. Arter der old gent pays fer gittin' his gal back, den Bob kin have her, if he wants her."

Watching his chance, the pugilist sneaked swiftly along, carrying the girl with ease. Once he came near being discovered, but he showed tact by playing a shrewd game. Placing the girl on her feet he held her up, saying angrily:

"Come erlong, ole woman! Blame yer! wot yer want ter go git loaded in dis way fer! It's der disgrace o' me! Don't I s'port yer well? Hain't it my dollars dat puts der fine togs on yer back? An' now yer goes an' gits drunk in a public place! I'm der only one as has a right ter git loaded. Come erlong, I say!"

The passing pedestrian scarcely gave them a glance. It was quite dark right there, and the man must have possessed the eyes of a hawk had he discovered anything more than a drunken woman and her angry companion.

"Holy jee! but dat was snug!" breathed Tom, when the danger was past. "If he'd nosed around, I'd give him a slug wot'd made him tired!"

He lifted the girl and hurried on again. At length, he found himself in a maze of alleys and narrow streets, every inch of which he seemed to know perfectly.

Dark figures skulked along the shadows. Now and then, one would speak to the man with the girl, but he seemed to know them all.

In fact, he was in a perfect rogues' retreat.

A secret signal admitted him to what seemed a low groggery. He spoke a few words to the proprietor, who nodded assentingly, and then he carried Irma along a dark passage. A flight of stairs carried him into some cellar rooms, beneath the groggery, and another passage led to the second and latest retreat of the Tenderloin Tigers.

Two hours later, Broadway Bob found Irma Webster there. The Rounder expressed his feelings in language unprintable, for he was in no way pleased.

"Why in the name of all that is evil did you bring her here?" he snarled at the Slugger.

"Where was I to take her?" was the sullen question.

"Anywhere—anywhere but here!"

"Why not here?"

"B'cause the devil is apt to be to pay! The whole town is aroused over the troubles and mysteries of this girl, and should she be traced, it would be the ruin of us all! A common offense we might smooth over, but the kidnapping of a rich man's daughter is something that will make the populace cry out for our punishment, if we are discovered."

"Den we mustn't be discovered. Dere hein't any great danger."

"Why not?"

"Der fly we was der most skeerd of won't boder us."

"Who?"

"Double-voice Dan."

"What do you know about Double-voice Dan?"

"Gane Gus says he's out o' it."

"Gus talks too much! The police are still in it, even if we are not troubled by Downing."

"Day hain't never bin able ter do much."

"Which is not a sure sign they never may. What do you think we are going to do with the girl?"

"I have seen some of der gang, an' dey're in fer holdin' her fer ransom."

"Oh, they are! Well, we will see 'about

that! If it is done, it must be done by the vote of a majority."

"Dat's all right."

"Do you think the boys will vote to do such a desperate and dangerous thing?"

"I reckon dey will w'en dey finds dey have der gal. Look here, pal, it kinder seems like youse wanted ter swaller der hull plum an' freeze der rest out."

This aroused Bob still more.

"I don't care what it looks like!" he hotly declared. "The Tigers would not have noticed Calvin Webster at all but for me."

"Well, now you's taken der gang in, you'd better stan' by der deal. Der man wot tries ter play double gits it in der neck—biff!"

"Do you dare charge me with double play?"

"I don't charge nobody, but even der boss won't be excepted. You knows who is chief of der Tigers, an' I guess we understand each oder pritty well. Youse don't want a scrap wid me, fer I'd—"

"Now don't you threaten me, Duke! I won't stand it, and there will be trouble instantly. I have put lots of money into your hands, first and last, and I can put a good deal more. But you must stand by me."

"Dat's all right. I'm wid you so long as it don't put me out wid der T. Ts."

And so the conversation ended in anything but a satisfactory manner to the Rounder. He did not venture to see Irma just then, but was told she had awakened and was calling for her friends.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A NIGHT OF WRETCHEDNESS.

A GROAN of dismay broke from Harold St. Clair's lips when he discovered Irma had disappeared.

"They have dragged her away!" he cried, huskily. "Follow those devils, officers—follow them quickly!"

"Look at here, young man," gruffly spoke one of the policemen, "you're drunk. I guess we'll run you in!"

"I am not drunk," asserted Harold, stepping away from the lamp-post. "I was attacked by three ruffians."

"Got into a street row, eh?" sneered the second cop. "The judge'll make it cost you for that."

"There was a young lady with me! She has been carried away by those wretches!"

Both policemen laughed in unison.

"It's likely she was carried off her own free will," the first one said. "I reckon you was worked, young feller. Them coves as jumped you was her friends."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the other officer, as if it was all a great joke. "You must have been raised in the woods, boy. You're surely pretty fresh."

All this was maddening to Harold.

"What do you take me for?" he shouted. "All my life has been spent in New York, and—"

"There is plenty of woods in Harlem, or used to be."

"But I am telling you the truth. Three men jumped on me. I knocked one over and kept the other two off until you came. You must have seen them running. I think the first man carried off the young lady. Come on! I call on you to assist me in finding them and taking her from them!"

"He's certainly loony," sneered one of the policemen. "I guess he has been drugged. Did you take lunch with the lady?"

Harold paid no heed to the question.

"If you will not aid me, I must follow them alone."

One of the policemen was inclined to arrest him, but the other advised against it, and Harold hurried away.

But he really had nothing to aid him in his search, and he soon discovered how useless it was.

"If I only had Dan Downing with me now!" he muttered, helplessly. "Poor little Irma! I am nearly crazed! Where can Double-voice Dan be? He seems to have vanished completely. Is it possible his enemies have succeeded in getting him out of the way?"

In truth, Dan Downing might have proved a great assistance to him then. He owed much to the Go-It-Alone Detective, who had so strangely vanished from view, for Dan it was who had saved him from death in the cellar of the haunted house of Rockaway Valley.

Although Broadway Bob was not aware of it, he was followed by the detective after leaving the roadside inn. This work proved extremely difficult for Downing, as the suspicions of the villain were aroused, and he was on the watch for a tracker.

However, Dan succeeded in trailing him into the vicinity of the haunted house before Bob quite gave the ferret the slip.

It was only a short time after Broadway Bob, Game Gus and Irma left the house that the detective approached it. He was prowling about the place when he heard a cry for help, which seemed to issue from the cellar.

Although he was cautious as well as brave,

the detective soon recognized the voice as that of Harold St. Clair. He did not lose much time in reaching the young man and releasing him from his unpleasant position.

From Harold's lips Dan learned what had occurred, and they were soon on their way to the nearest railway station, having hired a trap and driver at an exorbitant price. They were taken to the Del., Lac. & Western railway station at Boonton Falls, where a train that did not usually stop at that point was flagged.

Now it happened that Booth and Game Gus had taken Irma to Denville, where they started for Newark by the Morris & Essex. It will be remembered the train was delayed, which allowed Dan and Harold to arrive in Jersey City first. Good fortune had led the two to intercept the villains, and the trick which Dan played on the Rounder was carried out on the spur of the moment, Harold taking Irma away, while the detective entered the cab in her place.

Dan had told the young man of a plan to break down the nerve of the chief rascal by means of a quotation from the Bible concerning the wages of sin, and the young man had agreed to keep entirely out of sight, so Bob might believe him dead. In his way, he had aided Downing in the project.

Happening to be near when the runaway fire-truck overturned the cab containing Bob and Irma, Harold promptly led the girl away. He had some difficulty in getting her out of the crowd without being questioned, but succeeded.

The shock of the accident had broken the hypnotic trance into which Broadway Bob had thrown the fair girl, and, when she fully understood what had happened, she entreated Harold not to take her back to her home.

"Take me somewhere that I will be safe from Robert Booth!" she entreated. "In my own home I am completely at his mercy. My father cannot save me from him."

He could think of no other place than Mother Grogan's, and she willingly accompanied him there, knowing it would be impossible for her to put up at a hotel without attracting attention and soon being found out.

The old Irishwoman was very kind to the girl, as soon as she knew Irma was the sweet heart of the brave young man who had once befriended her Danny. But ill-luck had led their bitter foe to the spot, and now—

Where was Irma?

The question filled the helpless young man with despair. In vain he wandered about, searching for the lost love. At length, a thought came to him and he turned quickly toward Madison avenue.

Chartering a carriage, he was soon at Calvin Webster's door. His disappointment and despair on learning the broker had left the house ten minutes before can be better imagined than described.

"Everything is turning against me!" he cried, brokenly. "Oh, where is Dan Downing?"

Where, indeed?

He was swiftly driven back to the locality where the street encounter had occurred, and once more the blind, hopeless search began.

He finally appealed to a policeman.

"For God's sake, help me find her!" he entreated, after he had told what took place.

The officer looked him over carefully. Harold's face was ashen and his eyes wild and restless.

"Oi believe ye hiv been hittin' th' poipe," asserted the officer, with a rich brogue. "Av Oi know a smoker whin Oi say wan, yure tnat scamp. Yez hid betther go home an' toake a slape. Thot soame is whot yez nade."

The young man turned away in despair, realizing how impossible it was to make himself believed.

All the long night he wandered about the streets, searching, searching. In the morning he was found sitting on some steps, his head bowed between his hands.

After being aroused to a sensibility of his position, he started for his home. By chance, he met a friend who had been making a night of it, and, for the first time, Harold's story was listened to and believed.

"Great Scott, man!" cried his friend. "This is terrible! Why, I know little Miss Webster! Fine girl! Never liked Bob Booth. If I understand you, he is mixed in the business. He's a cad! Now, look here, old fellow, come into this cafe with me. I know you do not usually drink, but you must have something to brace you up now, for you look like a ghost. We'll talk it over."

Delighted at finding some one to whom he could tell the whole pitiful tale, Harold allowed himself to be led into the place and finally drank some whisky, which served to stimulate him for

Mag's, when the door suddenly opened and Broadway Bob stepped coolly in.

"Villain!" cried the broker, springing to his feet. "Do you dare face me again?"

The Rounder sneered.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Webster."

The unfortunate father put one hand to his head, around which there was a bandage.

"I know now you mean to ruin me!" he said, huskily. "Perhaps you have worked the ruin of my child already! What accursed fate ever threw me into your power? Where is my little girl? Wretch, what have you done with her?"

"You're getting excited, man," came slowly from the Rounder's lips. "It doesn't pay to get excited."

A sudden change came over Webster. He held out his hands appealing to the black-hearted rascal.

"For God's sake, Booth, bring my daughter back to me!" he implored. "I am an old man—I know it now—and she is all I have left! Would you rob me of the last ray of sunshine in my dreary life? You cannot be so cruel! Bring her safely back to me and I will bless you on my bended knees!"

"To Satan with your blessings! What do I want of them! I want money."

"I will pay you."

"How much?"

"How much will you do this for?"

"Well, let me see. About how much are you worth, Webster?"

The question was asked with the greatest sangfroid.

"Devil! do you mean to rob me of my last dollar?"

"That is not answering my question."

"I cannot answer it without time to do figuring. But why should you ask such a thing?"

"I want to find out just how much you will give to have me bring you back your child—"

"You must bring her back unharmed."

"—To bring you back your child—unharmed—and take my departure, never to bother you again. I don't know as I feel like marrying just at present."

"Thank Heaven!"

"But it will cost you money to buy me off."

"You mean to perpetrate blackmail?"

"Do you fancy the word? If so, call it that. I have little care."

"Dog! I can have you arrested and imprisoned for what you have done!"

"Do you think so?"

"I know it."

Bob smiled, calmly.

"That is where you make a big error," he declared. "How can you prove blackmail?"

"By my own testimony and that of Irma."

"To begin with, Irma is not at hand. Even if she were, neither of you could utter a word against me."

"Why?"

"You know my power. The moment you attempt to speak, I would make you say something other than you intended. I would baffle you completely. Why, I could make you act so strangely you would be declared insane."

A groan came from Calvin Webster's lips, for he knew the rascal spoke the truth. For a time, he had forgotten the evil influence Booth could exercise over them.

"You now understand your own footing," said the Rounder. "If you wish to make a charge against me, you are at liberty to do so, but I know you will never be able to prove anything."

The broker suddenly turned on Bob.

"But there is other evidence against you. I am not the only one. The cellar holds a secret!"

The Rounder started back, paling a trifle.

"The cellar?" he repeated. "What can you mean? I do not understand you?"

"You do!" screamed Webster, in sudden triumph and fury. "I can see it in your face! What crime did you commit in the cellar of this very house?"

"He cannot know!" thought the villain. "He was in a trance at the time, and I bade him forget. Something has aroused his suspicion, but he cannot know the truth."

Aloud, he said:

"Well, what of the cellar? What crime do you speak of, man?"

Then came the startling response:

"Murder!"

Despite his steadied nerves, the accused man fell back.

"Murder!" he repeated, his eyes fastened on Calvin Webster's face. "Then you know the secret of the furnace?"

"I know the secret!" was the triumphant assertion.

"You know too much for your own good!" snarled the Rounder, his face like a thundercloud. "And you would babble! I don't know how you obtained the secret, but I begin to fear you. You need not smile, for I promise you that fear shall cost you dear. I will not stand in fear of any living person. Do you know what that means?"

"That you would murder me, perhaps. If so, I am ready for you!"

From a drawer in a little desk, Calvin Web-

ster suddenly snatched a tiny revolver, which he leveled at Robert Booth's head.

The eyes of the two men met and they stood like statues for some moments. Then Bob laughed.

"It is useless for you to try it, my dear sir," he said. "I am bullet proof. Put down that weapon!"

Webster obeyed.

He was under the evil spell once more.

Bob walked over to the desk picked up the revolver, which he examined, finding every chamber loaded.

"Shall I kill him?" he asked himself, glancing secretly at the entranced broker. "That would put him out of the way, but it would fasten another crime on my shoulders. No, I have a better plan. *He shall kill himself!*"

He put the revolver down again.

"Webster."

"Yes, sir."

"After I am gone a servant will call here. You will tell him to come back in an hour for some letters you are going to write."

"Yes, sir."

"When he is gone and about thirty minutes after I leave the house, you will take this revolver from your desk, cock it, place it against your left breast and pull the trigger. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

Ten minutes later, Robert Booth left the house. As he was going out, he told the servant in the hall that his master wished to see him.

He had carefully laid his plans, and he felt confident of success, so he smiled as he thought: "Webster will be seen alive since I left the house, and so the least suspicion cannot fall on me. I could not let the man live, for I had really begun to fear him. How did he ever come to know anything of what occurred in the cellar? It is not impossible my power over him has begun to wane."

He paused suddenly, a startled look on his face.

"If that be true, he may not carry into effect the work I have ordered!"

After a moment, he went onward again.

"He will not escape; he was completely beneath my control."

Feeling as if he needed a drink, he made his way to a little saloon on Sixth avenue.

Bob was standing at the bar when he felt a touch on the arm and turned to see Sleek, the Shadow Sneak, at his elbow.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Where did you come from?"

"From a fruitless hunt," was the reply. "I do not seem to be making any headway at all."

"Never mind!" laughed the Rounder. "I am making headway enough for both of us."

"Then you can give me a pointer to work on?"

"I don't know as I shall need your services any longer."

The Shadow drew back, scowling.

"You are going to discharge me?"

"What if I am?" and Bob whirled suddenly.

"What would you do?"

"I don't know; I haven't thought it over."

"You would do something?"

"Well, when you are through with me, I may know a few things some other people will be willing to pay for."

The Rounder caught the bogus detective by the shoulder.

"Is this a threat?" he demanded, sternly. "I am not to be trifled with. Men who threaten me have a strange way of dying suddenly!"

The Grand street shark showed signs of fear.

"Oh, no, no!" he hastened to say. "It is not a threat—not at all—not at all!"

"Good!" said Bob, releasing the other. "Have a drink with me. I fancy I may still find some use for you. I only wanted to see what you would say if you thought I was going to drop you."

All at once, as they stood there at the bar, Bob fancied he heard strange whisperings in the air all about his head. He looked around, but could see no lips to utter the whisperings.

"It's my cursed nerves again!" he thought, but his hand shook when he poured out another drink. He lifted the liquor, and as it touched his lips, these words were bisected in his ear:

"The wages of sin is death!"

Down dropped the glass to be shattered on the bar, while the Rounder whirled and caught Sleek by the neck.

"What are you trying to do?" the excited man roared, while the teeth of the bogus detective fairly chattered.

And then, apparently from beyond the closed door of the closet where the choice liquors were kept, a voice cried:

"Robert Booth! Robert Booth!"

"Who calls me?" demanded the startled villain.

"Stand up and listen to the sentence of the court!" came back from the closet.

The attention of every man within the saloon was now attracted to the strange voice and to the pale faced man who stood clinging to the bar.

"You are found guilty of murder in the first degree, and it is my duty to sentence you to be

CHAPTER XLV.

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE.

CALVIN WEBSTER was alone in his library on the morning after his adventure at Red

executed in the manner prescribed by law!" seemed to come from the wine-closet.

"Curses on the fool who is hidden in there and trying to work this on me!" shouted Booth, snatching out a revolver. "It shall be the last practical joke of his life!"

He leaped forward and tore open the door of the closet. A lighted gas-jet threw its rays fairly into the small place, showing no living person was beyond the door.

For some moments Bob stood staring into the closet, holding fast to the door for support, his face devoid of color. All at once he caught his breath with a gasping groan, flung the door shut, then whirled and rushed wildly from the saloon.

People turned to look at the white-faced and wild-eyed man who tore so madly along the streets. Some of them heard him mutter:

"It was the spirit of that cursed detective! I am a haunted man!"

CHAPTER XLVI.

SUICIDE OR MURDER?

STRAIGHT to his hotel Broadway Bob hurried, and when he was within his room he carefully locked the door behind him, drawing a breath of relief.

Still there was a glare in his eyes and a sinking of his once plump cheeks, while his nerves were far from steady.

"Satan only knows what it all means!" he muttered. "It could not have been fancy, for the others in the saloon heard the voice as well as I. And yet no living thing larger than a rat could have been concealed from my gaze in that closet!"

He paced up and down the floor for a time, now and then peering out of the window.

"The man with the patch" was not below to still further unnerve him.

After a time, having grown calmer, he lay down on the bed and tried to secure the sleep he sorely needed.

He must have slept on the bed for hours, but he did not think he had slept, when he again seemed to hear that hated voice repeating those ominous words:

"The wages of sin is death!"

He started up.

Going to the window, he flung it open to get a breath of fresh air. Below him lay Broadway, up and down which the surface cars were creeping, while the people, looking like misshapen dwarfs, were swarming along the sidewalks. Cabs and carriages moved to and fro, and the familiar sounds of the city came up to his ears.

All of a sudden, as he stood there at the window looking downward, this man was seized by a feeling of unutterable loneliness and desolation. He could not understand it, for it was a new sensation to him, or, at least, one not experienced since boyhood—since the day he made his first appearance in New York with all his earthly possessions in the little grip his mother had given him, and no living being in all the great city to speak kindly to him and give him a helping hand.

If that mother had lived, it might have been different with him now. He could not help thinking of that. She had been a good woman, and, like all good mothers, she was very proud of her handsome boy. She had prayed that he might grow up a noble man, respected and honored.

The city had exercised a strange fascination over him. He had won his way into good society, but he had also made familiar with companions whom he should have avoided. He was sure he did not inherit the evil turn in his nature, but that it had grown and developed there as he grew more and more familiar with all the highways and byways of the glittering, alluring, delusive city.

And now, all at once, the city was repugnant to him. He hated it! How gladly would he fly from it to the quiet and peace of the blessed country! He despised the gloomy streets where the tall buildings shut out the sun. In the country the warm sunlight was not cut off by brick walls.

Then he thought of the old home. He would abandon the city and return there to spend the rest of his life in peace. The grim shadows might not follow him. He would visit the little grass-grown cemetery and stand with bowed head beside his mother's grave. All his old life should be put behind him.

What was that? A shrill cry came up from the street—the voice of a newsboy who seemed to be yelling as loudly as he could. The man in the window caught the words.

"E-e-extraw! E-e-extraw! All about der sewyside! Webster, der Wall street broker, shoots hisself! E-e-extraw!"

Bob Booth fell back, as if he feared somebody outside would notice his sudden excitement.

So his scheme had worked—Webster had committed suicide.

Suicide?

Nay, murder!

The life-blood of the man was on the hands of the one who had been dreaming of the country and his mother's grave!

He dreamed no longer.

"I must have one of those papers!"

He put on his hat and sauntered carelessly out to the elevator. He even whistled a bit to prove his utter freedom from care, and he tried to crack a joke with the elevator man, although he fancied the fellow stared at him strangely.

Walking slowly to the door, he waited till a boy happened to be passing, and then he purchased a paper. As he turned back, a friend collared him.

"By George, Booth! that's bad news about Webster, eh?" the man said, and Bob fancied he was looking into his very heart. "Shot 'himself! Poor devil! I wonder what he had been up to? May have been all over his girl, or he may have been involved. Don't seem like a man to shoot himself while the fate of his child is still a mystery. What do you think?"

Bob assured the other he had not yet read the account, and then he hurried to the elevator, breathing softly:

"Hang him! He looked at me suspiciously!"

The moment he reached his room he fell to reading the account in the paper. Suddenly the sheet dropped from his shaking hands and he sunk into a chair.

He had read that, although dangerously—probably fatally—wounded, Calvin Webster was not yet dead. Further than that, it was hinted there was a mystery about the suicide that the dying man might possibly clear up before the end came.

For a long time Bob sat in his chair, staring straight ahead, but seeing nothing. At length, he arose, forcing a laugh.

"I reckon he'll croak without blowing. It isn't half-possible he knows himself just why he did the shooting."

For a long time he paced up and down the room. Finally, he went to the window again.

Another boy was crying his papers on the street.

"Murder!"

That was the word which came up to Bob's ears. It put him in a perfect panic.

"Webster has blowed!" he gasped.

"He got out a small grip and carefully gathered all his small valuables, an unreasoning fear upon him. He could not take his clothes and his trunks, only the things that could be easily carried in one small bag. Having packed those articles, he waited for darkness.

Not a mouthful of food passed his lips, but at the earliest possible moment after the shadows of night came on he slunk from the hotel.

On the corner he felt a hand fall on his arm and a voice spoke his name. He wheeled and struck the man full in the face, putting all his strength into the blow.

Then he fled on and on, like the guilty, hunted wretch he was.

And beneath all the broad heavens there was no place that could shelter him from the retribution to come!

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE SHADOW SNEAK'S DOUBLE.

As he skulked like a homeless dog along the dark streets, Broadway Bob, no longer the elegant, debonair rounder, came face to face with Sleek, the Shadow.

"Just the man I want to see!" cried the bogus detective.

"Get out!" snarled Bob. "I don't want to see you! I am in a hurry."

"But I have something to tell you."

"Tell it some other time; can't stop now."

But Sleek would not let him go on.

"You must listen!" he asserted.

"Then lets get into this dive, where we will be out of sight."

Bob was nervous and restless, continually glancing about him, as if dreading the appearance of some one. He intended to deceive Sleek by getting the Sneak to enter the rum-shop in advance and skipping him as he passed through the door.

But the Grand street shark pushed the door open and held it for Bob to enter first.

Within the dive, which did not happen to be filled with patrons at that hour of the night, they passed to a little table at the back. Bob insisted on sitting down so he could see the door without turning his head in the least. He placed his grip on the table, and Sleek looked at it keenly, observing:

"Any one'd think you was making a skip fer it with that thing in your hand."

Bob started a bit, feeling a thrill of fear run over him.

"Never mind what anybody'd think," he growled. "I haven't much time to waste."

The Shadow eyed him keenly.

"You act mighty odd," he declared. "What's up? Heard about Webster, I s'pose?"

"Curse Webster!"

"Why, he's dying. Killed himself, you know. Some say it was murder, but I don't believe that, do you? They say you was the last to see him before the shooting. I wonder the officers didn't come after you to tell what you knew 'bout it."

Bob chewed nervously at his black mustache. Usually that mustache had been waxed and carefully trained, but now it was ragged and scraggy in appearance. There were rims of red around the man's eyes, and the pallor of his face seemed to have a blue tinge. He was enduring torture, although he tried to appear calm and self-possessed.

"I don't know anything at all about it," he hastened to say, as if trying to vindicate himself in Sleek's eyes. "Mr. Webster was all right when I left him."

"Do you really think he was governed by his own will when he attempted to take his life?"

Bob tried to reply, but a huge lump arose in his throat and blocked the words. What was this man driving at? Of a sudden, he began to fear Sleek, whom, up to that moment, he had held in the greatest scorn.

"It is possible he may have been led to kill himself," the Shadow Sneak went on, his eyes seeming to burn into Booth's very soul.

Where had Bob seen those eyes before he met Sleek? They fascinated and unnerved him.

"I haven't time to discuss this matter," he finally forced his lips to utter. "What did you bring me in here for?"

He had ordered whisky, which was now placed before him. His hand shook so the neck of the bottle rattled against the glass as he poured out the liquor.

"I think I know where the girl is," said Sleek.

"The deuce you do!" cried Booth.

The Shadow nodded.

"She is in the hands of the Tenderloin Tigers."

"Curse you! how did—"

Booth interrupted himself suddenly, falling back in his chair and glaring at the other. Then he caught up the glass of liquor and tossed it off at a single swallow.

Still those burning eyes were watching him with the gaze of a hawk's.

"Why, you are strangely excited!" said the bogus detective, apparently at a loss to understand the actions of the other.

"Look here, Sleek," and Bob leaned forward over the table, assuming a confidential tone, while with his left hand he pulled fitfully at his ragged mustache, "how much money do you want to retire from this business and keep your mouth shut forever after?"

"I don't know as I know just what you mean. What do you want me to keep my mouth shut about?"

"Anything and everything you know of the Webster affair."

"You will pay well?"

"As well as I can."

"Then you must have good reasons for doing so?"

"It makes no difference what my reasons are, so long as I pay."

"Well, I will keep still for about ten thousand dollars."

Bob fell back.

"Ten thousand devils!" he cried.

The door of the saloon opened and a man came in. Bob saw him enter, but the back of the Shadow was toward the door. The jaw of the Rounder suddenly dropped and he stared hard at the new-comer in the saloon, and well he might, for he was the perfect double of the man with whom he was talking.

Were there two Bob Sleeks?

It seemed so just then. Number Two stepped up to the bar and ordered a drink. His voice sounded exactly like that of the genuine Sleek!

"Have you heard the latest news about that Webster affair?" asked the man at the bar, speaking to the barkeeper. "It seems the dying broker has made a charge of murder against Robert Booth, who has been practicing hypnotism on him. Booth put him into a trance and then compelled him to shoot himself."

"That sounds like a fake!" returned the barkeeper, laughing at the apparent absurdity of the story.

All of a sudden, Booth cried:

"I'll not be trapped this way!"

Then he flung himself against the table, which he overturned, at the same instant upsetting the man who sat opposite.

Like a panther, he leaped out through the side door of the saloon and fled, panting and stumbling, into the darkness of an alley.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE TIGERS ARE TRAPPED.

RED MADGE found Irma Webster a captive in the Tigers' den, and she did her best to comfort the unfortunate girl.

"How came I in this horrible place?" Irma asked again and again.

"You were brought here by enemies, dear."

"But the last I remember, I was in your house. I fell asleep. It cannot be you are my enemy?"

"I am not—before Heaven I am not!" cried the Queen of the Crooks, with strange fervor.

"Then explain it all to me."

"I do not know as I can make you understand, or, if you understand, I do not know as you will believe. I gave you a powder to make you sleep—"

Irma uttered a cry.

"You drugged me?"

"For your own good, my dear. You were in a terrible state bordering on hysteria. Had you not been quieted, a severe illness must have followed."

"But, while I was unconscious, I was brought here. I do not understand that."

Madge told her the truth, only failing to state her father was injured in any way. Irma listened and believed.

"I thought I could not be mistaken in you," she said, with child-like trust. "Something made me feel you were my friend, and I trusted you."

"You shall not regret that trust my dear," whispered the Queen of the Crooks. "I will save you yet!"

Irma clung to her.

"You are so good—so good!" she sobbed.

Red Madge released the hold of the girl.

"Do not touch me!" she said, and there was a strange quiver in her voice. "I am not fit for such as you touch! I am a wicked, sinful creature, and you are a pure, innocent girl!"

"No, no!" cried Irma; "don't say you are wicked and sinful! I'll not believe it! You have a good face—you have been good to me."

But Red Madge drew away when the girl would have taken her hand.

"I have been kind to you," she acknowledged; "but it is the first act of genuine disinterested kindness I have done for years. Here you are a captive in the hands of wicked men—criminals. How does it happen I am here with you, free to go and come? Does it not look suspicious?"

"Still, you have a true face. It may be some one you love is here, and that makes you the companion of these villains. It must be that!"

The woman shook her head.

"You are wrong," she declared. "I am here of my own free will. I will tell you who I am. Among these men I am known as Red Madge, and I am called the Queen of the Crooks!"

Irma shrunk back a bit, causing the other to laugh bitterly.

"I knew you would shrink from me, but I do not blame you. Now—now you loathe me!"

"No, no; I do not—I pity! It cannot be you are here from choice—I will not believe it, even though you tell me so! Some cruel fate dragged you to this!"

"You think so because you do not know the impulses which govern some women's lives. You have never been tempted. But, oh! beware of the future! You cannot know what is to come!"

"You say you will still befriend me?"

"Yes," Red Madge glanced about to make sure she was not overheard. "I will assist you to escape from these wretches. When you get back to your home, you must refuse to ever see Bob Booth again. Your father knows him now for what he is. He is a dastard!"

"Oh, I know it—I know it! But I fear him! He possesses some strange and wonderful power!"

"If he does not see you at all, he will not be able to bring that power into play."

It was hours after that when Red Madge heard of the probable suicide of the broker.

"Poor little Irma—poor child!" muttered the Queen of the Crooks. "Her father needs her now, and I must go to her at once."

When the woman entered the Tigers' den, she was covered by a loose, flowing wrap and a veil hid her face. She lifted the veil to speak to the apparent proprietor of the strange groggery.

"I don't want to be seen coming in here too often in the daytime," she laughed. "This veil hides my identity."

The man declared it was a good scheme, and she went on into the cellar retreat.

That night, near the hour of twelve, the Tenderloin Tigers assembled in the "council chamber," so called, to discuss a matter of importance. They had been ordered to wear the tiger's head cowls, and all were gathered but Red Madge. For some reason the Queen failed to appear.

"We shall have to proceed without her," said the chief, whose voice was strangely excited and husky, while his hands were seen to falter now and then. "This may be the last meeting of the Tigers."

Mutterings of astonishment went around the circle.

"The last meeting!" exclaimed one. "Why should it be, oh chief?"

"Because we are in the greatest danger, although you may not be aware of it. Double-voice Dan is dead—dead as old Adam! But it seems as if the spirit of the accursed bloodhound were still at the old work! I have been dogged from one place to another by an invisible tracker! To-night I heard that it was known where Irma Webster was held a captive. I feel that disaster is close upon us, and the only way to avert it is to disband for a time."

To this there was no ready assent. The Tigers looked at each other in dismay, and the chief continued:

"Our game with Calvin Webster is played out. He had shot himself, but he tells some wild yarn about being forced to do the act by Robert Booth. My identity is no secret to you. I am

Robert Booth. This makes it necessary for me to shake the dust of New York from my feet for a time. As we can get no money from Webster, I suppose you will be more than glad to get rid of the girl, so I will take her with me. She will go along and do exactly as I wish. Disguised as an aged couple, we can give the police the slip, I think."

"It is a mad scheme," boldly declared one of the Tigers, rising to his feet. "If you are going to sneak away, you had better go alone."

The speech angered the chief, and for a time there was danger of an encounter. He still insisted on taking the girl with him, declaring he would run whatever risks might come, rather than give her up.

"I have fought and schemed for her," he declared, "and now I will possess her! Let her choose whether she will go with me or not."

He knew his power, and he meant to make her choose to go.

One of the band went to the place where the girl was confined, unlocked the door and led her out into the lighted cellar.

Then a cry of astonishment came from the Tigers.

It was not Irma, but Red Madge, the queen!

"What does this mean?" cried the chief. "Where is Irma Webster?"

"Safe beyond your reach, Bob Booth," returned the woman, gazing at him with flashing eyes. "I have set her free and sent her to the side of her dying father!"

The chief was furious.

"Woman," he raved, "you shall suffer for this!"

Red Madge laughed in his face.

"I do not fear you," she declared. "At heart, you are no better than a coward! This very night you mean to get out of the city to escape the consequences of your crimes. A man worthy to be chief of the Tenderloin Tigers would remain and face the thing out."

"I am proud of having robbed you of the fair girl you would have destroyed! I took her place, and, disguised by my wrap and veil, she made her way to freedom. I had told her how to act and what to say, and she must have played her part well."

"So you have turned on the gang?"

"No! I deny it! I have not worked against them, but you have played a double game. You start, for you know it is true! The gang served as your tools—nothing more. Your aim and object was to obtain possession of Irma Webster and her father's wealth. Then you would have vanished, and your pals could have whistled."

"It is false!"

"It is true—you know it is true!"

Suddenly, without the least warning, there came a thundering thumping at the heavy door. Appalled, the Tigers started back.

Crash! crash! came the blows on the door—blows which made it shake and totter.

"The cops!" gasped Broadway Bob, flinging aside his cowl. "We must escape the secret way!"

"Stop!" cried one of the Tigers, blocking the path. "Stop, I command you!"

"Who are you?"

"Your bitter foe!"

The tiger's head cowl was flung aside!

Double-voice Dan, alive and in the flesh, stood there!

CHAPTER XLIX.

WHICH CLOSES THE BOOK.

WITH a groan of horror Robert Booth crouched to the ground, trembling like an aspen, all his old bravado gone. He was sure he looked upon a disembodied spirit.

Not so with his companions.

Dan Downing knew they would fight, and a pair of glistening revolvers appeared in his hands.

At the same instant the heavy door fell with a crash, and men in the uniforms of the police burst into the room.

"Give up quietly," ordered Dan Downing. "It will be the worse for you if you resist!"

Still some of the Tigers fought.

A single pistol-shot was heard!

At the sound Dan leaped forward and bent over Bob Booth, who lay stretched on the ground.

The miserable wretch had shot himself!

"Don't touch me!" he shrieked, being still conscious when the detective bent over him. "You have hunted me to my death! Are you satisfied?"

Despite Booth's terror Dan tore open his clothes and looked at the wound. A glance showed him the villain had not many minutes to live!

"Well, you have done it!" said the Double-voice Detective in disappointment.

Bob's wild eyes were staring at him.

"Are you really alive?" he gasped.

"Certainly I am," assured Dan. "I was not built to be killed by your kind!"

"How in the name of God did you escape?"

"From the furnace?"

"Yes."

"That was easy. The fire you lighted was still a tiny blaze when you cast me in. I struck fairly upon it, and the flames were smothered."

I was not burned at all, and you utterly failed in your dastardly purpose. I know not what chance brought Calvin Webster into the cellar, but I had managed to work my lips free of the gag, and when I called, he opened the furnace door and dragged me out. He knew not how I came there, as he was completely within your vile power when he aided you to cast me in. I explained all, making him promise to keep my secret. I caused the wood in the furnace to be burned and some bones of an animal were cast into the fire to fully carry out the deception in case you investigated."

The dying wretch groaned.

"The end has come as you said it would!" he gasped. "Where have you been since getting out of the furnace?"

"Shadowing you. You made a compact with Bob Sleek, but I knew all about it. I bought the treacherous Grand street fake and made him disappear from view. Since you met him in his office and offered him sixty dollars a week to do your dirty work you have not seen him until this very night, when he came into the saloon where you and I were talking together. I made up like Sleek and played a duplex game. I was two detectives in one."

The dying man did not doubt the story, for he now believed Dan Downing could do anything he pleased.

"As a ventriloquist I was able to make you believe you were haunted. Concealed in your room, I nearly frightened you into a spasm, and I it was who produced the mysterious whisperings in the air. It was I who sentenced you, as it seemed, from the wine-closet of the Sixth avenue saloon."

"You have played a losing game—a criminal always does. He may seem to be lucky for a time, but he is bound to lose at last."

"I believe you," faintly whispered Booth. "Honesty is the only policy that really pays."

Then he began to wander in his mind. In a short time he was dead.

The Tigers were all captured, but the influence of Double-voice Dan enabled Red Madge to escape, as she was represented to be a captive in their hands.

"Take warning by what you have seen and experienced," the detective advised. "There is but one kind of a life to live—that is a square one. I have saved you because of your kindness to little Irma. That one act, in a great measure, atones for your shadowy past. Put all the old life behind you and try to be a better woman in the future."

She thanked him. She was not humble, but sincere.

The newspapers for days were filled with stories of Dan Downing's remarkable scoop. He was given the credit he really merited, for Byrnes himself, always just, always magnanimous, asserted Downing had been of inestimable assistance to the police.

Restricted by no rules and under the orders of no superiors, the Go-It-Alone Detective had worked the case out in a manner most satisfactory to himself. Those who question his methods should look at his success.

Fortune turned Calvin Webster's way at last, for he did not die from his wound. Irma's gentle nursing brought him back to health, and there was no reason why he should again feel a thrill of fear on account of the wonderful hypnotic power which had so nearly ruined him and robbed him of his life.

When his infamy was fully known, Robert Booth had no friend to give him burial or mourn his end. Dan Downing settled the undertaker's and sexton's bills, and the only stone that marks Booth's last resting place is one bearing these words:

"The wages of sin is death."

Game Gus, Dandy Dave and Tom Duke were captured with the other Tigers, and their punishment was sentences of various lengths. The entire gang met their deserts, and the great Tenderloin District was never again troubled by them.

Calvin Webster had no thought of putting a barrier between his dear daughter and the brave young man she loved, and, in due time, Irma and Harold were married.

Dan Downing, looking every inch the gentleman in his dress suit, was best man.

Red Madge disappeared from the places that had known her best in the great city. Calvin Webster never saw her again, but he received a letter from the woman—a letter which he has never shown to a living being and which he treasures with the greatest care. Sometimes he takes it from its place of concealment and reads it carefully through. A strange softening will come to his features and he will murmur:

"Poor Jennie! She had a good heart after all!"

Dan Downing is still in the field, and the rogues of New York regret he has returned to his old profession. They hate him most heartily and, at the same time, their admiration for him is unbounded.

THE END.

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